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## Motivation and Decision Making in City Break Travel

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# Chapter One

## Introduction



## 1.1 Introduction

In recent times cities have emerged as the principal centres of human activity where the majority of the world's population work, live, and recreate. Towns and cities represent distinct areas where people concentrate and where economic enterprises locate, providing the opportunity for the production and consumption of goods and services. Consequently, cities are places that facilitate a diverse range of social, cultural and economic activities and where tourism, leisure and entertainment form major service components (Page & Connell, 2006).

The city as a geographical entity is playing an increasingly significant role in the growth of international tourism. This marks a big change from a few decades ago when many of the post industrial cities of Europe were suffering from significant economic decline resulting in high unemployment and social problems. In the 1980s, many of the major cities of Western Europe began to undertake significant regeneration initiatives aimed at breathing life back into beleaguered city economies. In the emergent areas of urban management and city marketing, tourism has taken on an increasingly important role. Many cities now see tourism as a means of economic diversification and job creation (Lennon & Seaton, 1998). Numerous urban centres now boast a range of significant features including, waterfront developments, convention centres, new or renovated museums, theatres, market places, rejuvenated ethnic quarters and new iconic landmarks. City centres are again beginning to buzz from the social, leisure and work activities of hordes of newfound visitors. Not surprisingly therefore, given its growth in recent years, urban tourism now plays a pivotal role in the economic development strategies of city governments around the world (Judd & Fainstein, 1999). However, in spite of its significant contribution to urban and national economies, city tourism has not yet been comprehensively examined. Although the past two decades have seen a significant rise in the amount of literature and academic studies on the subject (e.g. Jansen-Verbeke, 1986; Buckley & Witt, 1985; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990, 2000; Law 1993, 1996, 2002; Page 1995; Murphy, 1997; Mazanec, 1997; Judd & Fainstein, 1999; Hall & Page, 2002; Wöber, 2002), much research still needs to be undertaken in order to get a full and comprehensive knowledge of urban tourism. This includes gaining a better understanding of the various elements that make up the sector and how they interrelate.

### **1.1.1 The Importance of City Break Travel**

Although much of the recent body of literature on urban tourism has broadened our awareness of the topic, some deficiencies and gaps still remain. For example, while urban tourism demand has been addressed by various authors (Buckley & Witt, 1989; Page, 1995), analysis of the specific visitor groups that make up this demand has been less forthcoming. The city break market is one of the most notable cases in point. It is true to say that city break visitors have largely been overlooked in terms of academic examination. With a few notable exceptions (Trew & Cockerell, 2002; Kazakov, 2000) most of the commentary in relation to city break travel has come from reports produced for and by the tourism industry and by market research firms. This lack of academic research is a concern, particularly when one considers that city break travel has become one of the most significant growth sectors in European tourism in recent years. According to IPK International's World Travel Monitor, European city breaks grew by 12% in 2004, compared to an increase of just 5% in sun and beach holidays. Yet, our understanding of this important niche market remains relatively poor. Little empirical data specifically addressing city break travellers and city break trip-taking currently exists. This is a significant gap in the urban tourism knowledge base and is a weakness that this research will address.

## **1.2 City Break Visitors and Segmentation**

The idea to segment markets is essentially based on the belief that no single population is fully homogenous and that there is no 'average man' or woman (Plummer, 1974, p.34). Instead, populations are made up of people who are different and who do things for different reasons. Consequently, there is a need to identify and categorise these differences in order to allow for a greater understanding of the population. Effective segmentation therefore involves the sorting of consumers into relatively homogenous groups (Aaker, 1995).

In relation to city break travel, two questions immediately arise. Firstly, is there a distinctive city break segment, and if so, how does it differ from other city visitor segments? These are important points that require examination if we are to deepen our understanding of this growing travel market. City break visitors have rarely been separately identified and empirically examined in urban tourism research. This is regrettable as segmenting visitor markets along such

lines can be very informative for destination management bodies. Indeed, in many cases such segmentation offers potentially more valuable data than traditional socio-demographic breakdowns, which Bieger & Laesser (2000, p.56) describe as being “increasingly less helpful for the segmentation of guest groups.” Thus, the need to identify and examine city break visitors as a distinctive urban tourism segment is something that is both needed and overdue.

### **1.3 Distinguishing Types of Trips**

As well as examining the distinctiveness of city break visitors themselves, it is also important to analyse the nature of the trips they take. Although every holiday is different and unique in its own way, there are nonetheless some trips that tend to have similar characteristics and tend to follow similar patterns of behaviour – sun package holidays and cruise trips being clear examples. A good deal of anecdotal information exists about the nature of city break trips. However, little definite empirical information has emerged in the literature. Much of this is due to a lack of clarity surrounding the issue of what constitutes a city break. Most people assume they know what a city break trip is, yet definitions differ greatly (see Trew and Cockerell, 2002; Mintel, 2002). This represents a difficulty in our attempt to understand the city break market. As researchers increasingly recognize the significance of *type of trip* in understanding visitor behaviour (Sung, Morrison, Hong, & O’Leary, 2001; Bloy, 2000; Hudson, 1999) it has become more important to focus attention on the characteristics of different holidays and highlight the distinctiveness between them. Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) describe type of trip (including factors such as travel party and duration) as being a crucial element in people’s travel decision process. The need to examine the city break trip in terms of its distinctive characteristics is therefore evident and represents another aspect of this investigation.



## **1.4 Cities and the Travel Decision Process**

As Hwang et al. (2006) point out research on urban tourism focuses mostly on management aspects related to urban destinations, with the integration of behavioural approaches regarding city tourism research being largely ignored. Consequently, aspects of tourist consumer behaviour in relation to cities, and in particular city break travel, have not been fully recognized or explored. This is a significant impediment to our understanding of these markets as a good knowledge of consumer behaviour “lies at the heart of all modern marketing theory and practice,” (Middleton, 1994, p.58). If, as Runyon & Stewart (1987) posit, the goal of consumer research is the development of conceptual frameworks identified in research studies, then city break consumer research is unfortunately severely lacking. According to Hwang et al. (2006) the scarcity of research regarding consumer behaviour and city tourism can be attributed to both the heterogeneity of cities, and the varied functions of their facilities. However, one could argue that these factors only serve to emphasise the importance of focusing the research effort on the variety of individual elements that make up urban tourism consumption. Indeed, trying to apply general models of consumer behaviour to all aspects of urban tourism demand is fraught with difficulties. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of travel decision making where changing market conditions and shifting holiday preferences have altered traditional behaviour patterns. Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) highlight a growing criticism of the established travel decision models, suggesting they tend to view tourists as a homogenous group, failing to take into account the diversity of traveller segments. In addition, Decrop & Snelders (2004) point out the importance of exploring a number of different decision making processes rather than employing the traditional models that assume decision makers to be cognitive problem solving consumers. Such models may be unsuited and not reflective of many contemporary travel decision situations such as city break trips. The decision, for example, to take a city break and the decision to take a family sun package holiday are likely to involve different behaviour patterns. But how exactly do they differ, and what are the specifics of each decision? The answers to these questions are undoubtedly of interest to tourism marketers. As Middleton (1994, p.59) points out “effective marketing in competitive conditions is impossible without some understanding of buyer’s motivations and decision processes.” Only through such understanding can tourism businesses put in place the correct marketing strategies and also enhance the

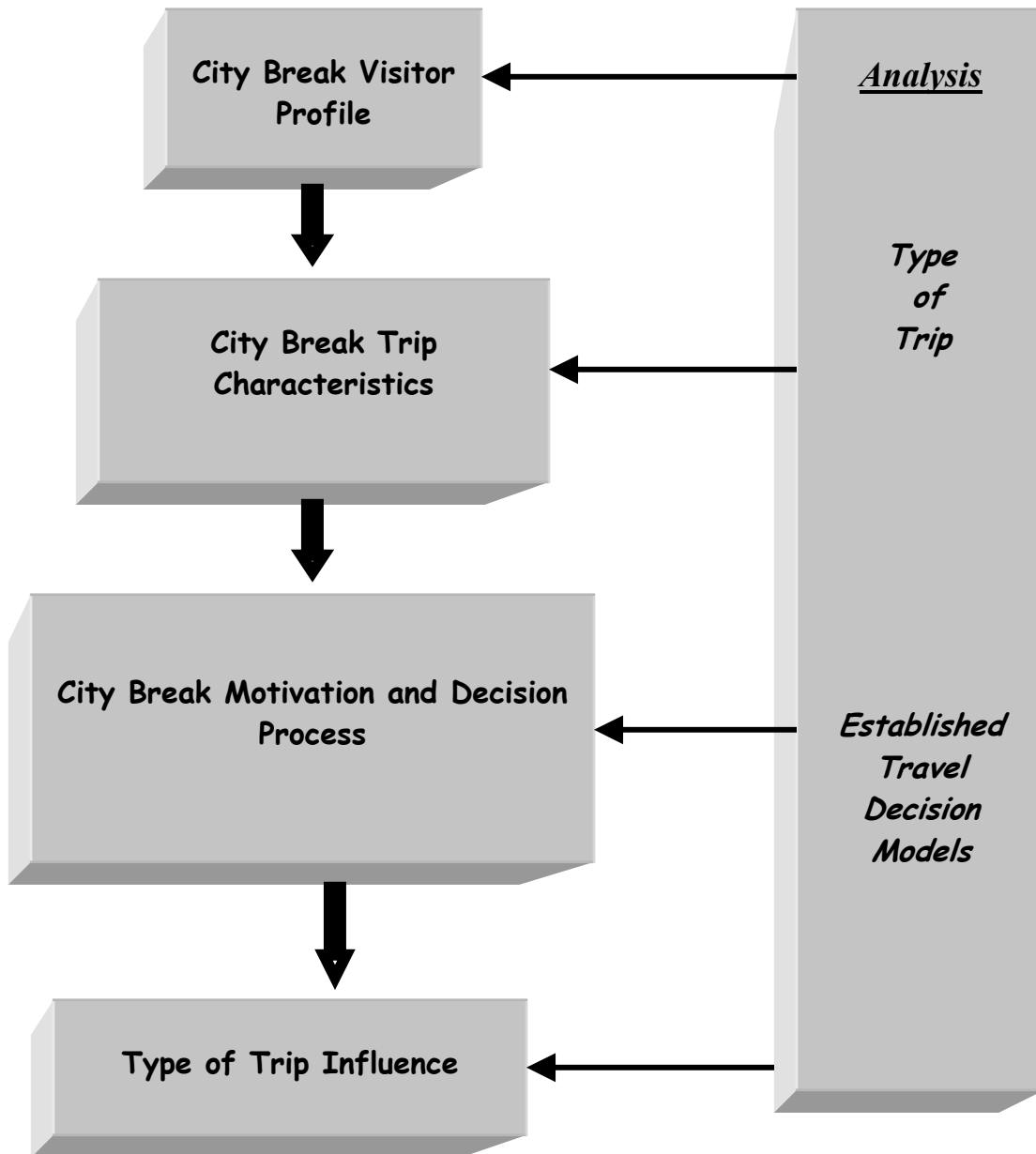
likelihood of improving traveller's experiences (Woodside & King, 2001). It seems timely therefore, to explore and uncover the motivations and decision making behaviour of city break travellers, particularly in light of their growing relevance and increased significance to city tourism stakeholders.

## **1.5 Research Aims**

The previous sections have described major shortcomings that exist in our understanding of city break travel. In addition, the reasons why these shortcomings need to be addressed have been highlighted. These gaps reflect the focus points of this investigation and consequently form the basis of the research aims. In order to illustrate these aims, as well as the research approach adopted, the research model in Figure 1.1 was designed. This represents the main areas to be covered in this investigation, showing how each relates to the other and the sequence in which they will be addressed. The model shows the four key areas of enquiry into the city break travel market. Firstly, the identification of a visitor profile; secondly, the examination of city break trip characteristics; thirdly, the exploration of city break motivations and decision making behaviour; and fourthly, the investigation of type of trip as an influencing factor in decision making behaviour.

The size of each of the four main boxes indicates the amount of research effort that will be allocated to each area. One can see, therefore, that the main emphasis of the research involves establishing the motivations and decision making behaviour of city breakers. Motivation is intentionally singled out here as it will receive particular attention in this research. Exploring city break motives is essential to understanding the city break travel decision which ultimately forms the core of what this investigation is trying to uncover. However, it is important to note that the four focus areas are interrelated, and as the arrows show, they follow a sequential pattern, with one leading onto the next. Thus, exploring the city break travel decision is dependent on firstly understanding who city break travellers are, and the characteristics of the trips they take.

**Figure 1.1**  
**Research Model**



The box on the right hand side of the model indicates the important factors that will influence the analysis at each stage. The significance of the type of trip that people take is a theme that runs right through this research and has a bearing on all the research focus areas as indicated in the model. In addition, the review and comparison of established travel decision models is also

crucial to the research approach, particularly to the third research focus area where the city break travel decision is explored in-depth.

Overall the model attempts to illustrate the main focus points of the research. These, and other issues discussed in this chapter are now articulated in the form of the research aims of the investigation. These are:

1. To examine the city break travel phenomenon by reviewing existing literature and studies on the topic.
2. To develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists.
3. To analyse the distinctiveness of city break trips by uncovering their principal characteristics and features.
4. To investigate the motivations and decision-making behaviour of city break holidaymakers.
5. To examine the influence of ‘type of trip’ in the travel decision process.

These aims will be discussed further in Chapter 4 where the specifics on how they will be addressed are explained.

## **1.6 Structure of the Study**

The book will follow a logical structure that involves an established pattern of research enquiry. The issues raised in this chapter will be critically analysed and elaborated on throughout the work. Thus, following this introduction, **Chapter 2** begins the review of the literature relating to the research topic. The first area to be examined is urban tourism and then more specifically city break travel. The relevant concepts and theories in these areas are considered and reviewed.

In **Chapter 3** the attention switches to consumer behaviour and in particular decision making in relation to tourism. The relevant consumer behaviour theories and decision making models are assessed and their shortcomings regarding the city break travel decision are highlighted.

**Chapter 4** turns to the subject of methodology and focuses on ‘how’ the research was carried out. It reviews the various research paradigms and justifies the particular two-phase methodological approach chosen in order to achieve the overall aims of the research. In addition the sampling process and specific research techniques employed are explained and defended.

**Chapters 5 and 6** detail the findings from two separate phases of primary research. Phase One (Chapter 5) represents quantitative data from a survey of visitors to Dublin, while Phase Two (Chapter 6) details the qualitative findings from in-depth interviews relating to city break visitors’ motivations and decision making behaviour.

**In Chapter 7**, the most pertinent findings and insights from the previous chapters are brought together and discussed in order to address the aims of the research.

**Chapter 8** concludes the investigation where a review of the principal findings is presented along with an explanation of their significance. In addition, a justification for the whole research undertaking is given along with limitations and suggestions for further research.

In summary, this chapter has outlined a rationale for the study of city break travel, and in particular, investigating the motivations and decision processes involved in such trips. City breaks represent an increasingly popular type of travel that does not necessarily correspond with many established models of travel behaviour. As the topic has received limited research attention up to now a significant gap exists in relation to our understanding of this important area. It is the intention of this research to address this gap.

# Chapter Two

## A Review of Urban Tourism and City Break Travel

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the literature in relation to urban tourism and in particular the demand elements that comprise it. It begins by focusing on the emergence of the subject as an important field of tourism research and the attempts by various authors to conceptualise it as a distinct discipline. Urban tourism demand is investigated and the characteristics of city visitors are examined. Various segmentation options are explored and their relevance in a city tourism context is investigated. The focus then switches specifically to city break travel where the growth and importance of this market are examined. The characteristics of these trips are looked at, along with the influence of low cost airlines. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Dublin city, as an example of one of Europe's most popular city break destinations.

## **2.2 Cities and City Tourism**

The city as a physical entity has intrigued people for many years including planners, administrators and more recently academics. In the introduction to his seminal book 'The Culture of Cities' (1938), Lewis Mumford describes a city as "the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community." Such concentrations of power and culture have existed, in one form or another for millennia where historically cities developed as centres of trade and commerce, usually with some form of organised administration. Even amongst the earliest recorded cities, features such as urban planning, municipal governments, and urban sanitation systems were evident.

So what exactly is a city? Officially, there is no universally agreed definition. The term city is usually used to denote some form of large urban settlement, with geographic size and population being two of the most common determining factors. However, an examination of different international interpretations reveals some significant variations. In some cases a specific population figure (such as 100,000) is the critical determinant, particularly in terms of differentiating between a large town and a city. In other cases, city status is often designated by governments or historically by monarchies. In some situations, the presence of a cathedral, university or some other important institution can be an important factor.

It is obvious from the above that cities are complicated phenomena that are clearly difficult to properly define. However, in reality, for most people, the definition and conceptualisation of a city is largely immaterial. At an individual consumer level, people's personal perceptions of what a city represents is far more salient. Everybody, in their own mind, has an idea of what a city is and what it is not – technical details such as population size or legal status often have little relevance to an individual's perception of a city. For some, a city may signify a social place, somewhere exciting and thrilling, while for others it may represent a place that is sufficiently big to allow anonymity. Therefore, what each individual expects from a city may differ considerably. Such a view has important implications for city businesses, particularly tourism businesses, as consumers' perceptions of urban centres reflect significantly on their consumption and visitation patterns. Understanding these perceptions should therefore be a priority for city tourism stakeholders.

### **2.2.1 Academic Neglect of Urban Tourism**

According to Law (1996), the large city as an important tourism destination came of age during the 1980s. This was the time when older industrial cities were losing jobs on a large scale and the potential of tourism to create new employment was recognised. The potential of tourism to regenerate areas began to be considered and governments started to recognise its role in urban economic development (Buckley & Witt, 1985, 1989). The popular media began featuring city breaks and people started to view cities as destinations in their own right rather than just as generators of travel demand.

However, Law (1996) states that academics studying cities have given very little attention to the role of tourism. Many academic books and papers are still written as if tourism only happens in coastal and ski resorts, and the role of tourism in urban economies is often ignored. Ashworth (1989, p.33) acknowledges that urban tourism research has essentially fallen between two stools and notes that

*...a double neglect has occurred. Those interested in the study of tourism have tended to neglect the urban context in which much of it is set, while those interested in urban studies... have been equally neglectful of the importance of the tourist function of cities.*



Page (2002, p.113) points out that one likely reason there has been a neglect of academic research of urban tourism is due to the complexities of analysing the subject area - particularly in how one is to segregate the tourist/recreational from the non-tourist/recreational function of cities. Pearce (2001) supports this view and believes the need to 'disentangle' urban tourism from other urban functions makes it more difficult to study. The complexity of the urban setting with its associated activities makes proper analysis difficult.

In addition, Page believes writers on urban tourism have failed to produce much in the line of theory and general conclusions. Even though more publications are now appearing in the academic literature, this does not imply that urban tourism is recognised as a distinct and notable area of research in tourism studies. This is due to urban tourism research being too often based on studies that do not contribute to a greater theoretical or methodological understanding of urban tourism. This opinion is reiterated by Pearce (2001, p.928) who states:

*While special issues of journals and books on urban tourism have provided some structure to this emerging field, there is still a considerable way to go in terms of developing a coherent corpus of work, pursuing common goals and carrying out comparable studies.*

He goes on to observe that most city-specific studies adopt a largely empirical approach, with the emphasis commonly being on describing tourism in the specific setting rather than using the situation there to address questions of a more general nature.

### **2.2.2 City Government Neglect of Urban Tourism**

However it is not just academics who have been neglectful of the importance of urban tourism. City planners and local governments have consistently ignored the value and significance that tourism contributes to most large cities and many towns. According to Blank (1994, pp.184-185) “many urban leaders give the tourism industry less support than if its role and scope were more clearly defined.”

Burtenshaw et al. (1991) comment that the neglect of urban tourism is a result in part, of the perception of tourism as an external influence over which the city has little control and therefore does not consider it to be within their competence or authority. In addition, tourism is difficult to isolate as a separate industry or even activity and this invisibility hides its importance and makes its full influence more difficult to estimate.

## **2.3 Towards an Understanding of Urban Tourism**

While urban tourism can be said to be a distinct niche in the overall field of tourism, many authors have sought to clarify this concept. Pearce (2001) and others stress that urban areas are distinctive and complex places. When cities are considered as settings in which tourism develops, this complexity becomes inherent in the structure and nature of urban tourism, giving it characteristics that set it apart from other types of tourism.

Shaw & Williams (1994) point out that urban areas are varied and wide ranging and present three characteristics that help researchers to understand their uniqueness and similarities. Firstly, urban areas are heterogeneous in nature, meaning they are different and diverse when considered in terms of size, function, location, appearance and history. Secondly, towns and cities are multifunctional areas, in that they simultaneously provide various functions for different groups of users (e.g. a city can act as a home for some people, a workplace for others and a centre of entertainment for someone else). Thirdly, the tourist functions of towns and cities are rarely produced or consumed solely by tourists, given the variety of user groups in urban areas.

In cities, tourism is but one function among many, with tourists sharing and/or competing with residents and other users for many services, spaces and amenities. It is this multifunctional nature of cities and diversity of users that makes the identification and measurement of urban tourism and urban tourists more difficult. Indeed, Blank & Petkovich (1987, p.165) argue “urban tourism is almost certainly among the most misunderstood and underestimated of all tourism types. It suffers from underestimation – sometimes even unrecognition.” Thus, urban tourism presents a more complex scenario for tourism planners and managers as the heterogeneous nature of the sector sets it apart from other forms of tourism. According to Shaw & Williams (1994, p.207):

*Within the somewhat limited literature on visitor activity in urban areas, two main perspectives can be identified. One concerns the types of users and visitor motivation, while the other, with an even smaller research base, examines visitor behaviour in the city.*

Ashworth (1992) identifies three approaches towards the analysis of urban tourism which researchers have focused on:

1. The supply of tourism facilities in urban areas, involving inventories (for example, the spatial distribution of accommodation, entertainment complexes and tourist related services) where urban ecological models have been used. In addition, a facility approach is sometimes used to identify the tourism product offered at destinations;
2. The demand generated by urban tourists, to examine how many people visit urban areas, why they choose to visit, and their patterns of behaviour, perception and expectations in relation to their visit;
3. Perspectives of urban tourism policy, where the public sector (for example, planners) and private sector agencies have undertaken or commissioned research to investigate specific issues of interest to their own agenda for urban tourism.

In the context of this study, the second of these approaches is particularly relevant. The emphasis of the research will focus predominantly on *who* visits urban areas and *why* and *how* they choose to do so. To this end it is necessary to turn our attention towards the urban tourist or urban visitor and attempt to get a greater understanding of the principal character in the urban tourism phenomenon.

## 2.4. Urban Tourism Demand

A good starting point for examining the urban tourist is to analyse available visitor data and information relating to cities and urban areas. Page (1995) provides a detailed assessment of the principal international data sources on urban tourism, reviewing published statistics by the World Tourism Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. He points out one of the problems with much of these statistics is the reliance on accommodation sources for the data. Whilst this may be relevant for certain categories of tourists (for example, business travellers and holiday-makers), those visitors staying with friends and relatives within an urban environment would not be included in the statistics. Even where statistics can be used, they only provide a preliminary assessment of scale and volume; more detailed sources are needed to assess specific markets for urban tourism.

### 2.4.1 Urban Tourism Typologies

When analysing ‘types of tourists,’ it is necessary to look at previous attempts to develop typologies of tourists. Typology, according to Cooper et al. (1998) is a method of sociological investigation that seeks to classify, in this instance, tourists according to a particular phenomenon, usually motivations or behaviour. Some early examples of this can be seen in work by Cohen (1972) and Plog (1977).

Cohen (1972) distinguished between four types of tourist travellers:

- *The organised mass tourist*, on a package holiday that is highly organised. Their contact with the host community in a destination is minimal.
- *The individual mass tourist*, who uses similar facilities to the organised mass tourist but also desires to visit other sights not covered on organised tours in the destination.
- *The explorers*, who arrange their travel independently and who wish to experience the social and cultural lifestyle of the destination.
- *The drifter*, who does not seek any contact with other tourists or their accommodation – seeking instead to live with the community.

Although Cohen's typology is rather simplistic and does not take into account the increasing diversity of holiday-making and inconsistencies of tourist behaviour, it does afford a way of organising and understanding tourist activity.

Stanley Plog's (1977) approach to a typology of tourists suggests that travellers can be divided into different psychographic traits, i.e. allocentrics, near allocentrics, midcentrics, near psychocentrics, and psychocentrics. The polar extremes of these groups can be described as exhibiting the following characteristics:

- **Allocentrics** seek cultural and environmental differences from their norm, belong to the higher income groups, are adventurous and require very little in the way of tourism plant.
- **Psychocentrics** seek familiar surroundings, belong to the lower income groups, are unadventurous and demand a high level of tourism plant.

However, in practice, the majority of tourists fall between these two extremes in the **midcentric** segment.

It is important to note that Plog's theory relates to the United States population only, it is therefore uncertain whether his findings are similarly applicable to European markets.

However both Cohen and Plog's classification of tourists fail to explain the complexity of urban tourism.

According to Blank and Petkovich (1987), there are a number of important points to consider when attempting to assess why visitors seek urban tourist destinations:

- Cities are areas of high population density. Thus, travel to 'visit friends and relatives' constitutes a major tourism sector in nearly all cities;
- Most cities are major travel nodes, and are often the focal point of tourist-transport interchanges and termini;
- Manufacturing, trade and finance concentrate in cities, all of which require a flow of travel and people interaction;

- All types of people services concentrate in cities. These include health care, education, government and headquarters for various special interest groups and associations;
- Cities offer a wide variety of cultural, artistic and recreational experiences.

It is clear therefore that cities, as destinations, are complicated entities. They represent an amalgam of diverse interests and activities. As Page (2002, p.120) points out “urban visits...are multi-faceted and structured around different motives.” Differentiating between these different motives is particularly challenging for urban tourism planners and businesses, particularly when many tourists display a combination of motives for visiting a city. It is important therefore to approach urban tourism demand with care and examine its main actors (urban tourists) in a more holistic manner.

#### **2.4.2 *Is There an Urban Tourist?***

So who visits cities? The evidence would seem to suggest that it is almost impossible to construct a generic profile of a typical urban tourist. This is mostly due to factors already stated, such as the multifunctional nature of a city and the diversity of its users. In addition, cities vary considerably in terms of their perceived endowment for offering tourism/recreational experiences. In other words, every city’s tourism is unique. An analysis of cities in the United States shows that the pattern of demand varies strikingly. For example in Kansas City visits to ‘friends and relatives’ make up almost half of the total person-trips, while ‘business and conventions’ is the main travel reason for Chicago. In Orlando Florida, the dominant tourist type are those seeking entertainment and sightseeing. This discrepancy between cities is also evident in the demographic characteristics of its visitors. A recent visitor survey in Dublin city (Flanagan & Dunne, 2008) showed the travel party composition of visitors as being mostly made up of couples, with only 6% involving children. Contrast this with the typical leisure visitor to Orlando Florida, home of Disneyworld, where children make up a major proportion of the total.

These distinctions indicate the special make-up of travel to each individual city and show the difficulty, if not impossibility, of trying to develop a generic urban tourist profile that fits all cities.

Instead analysis of urban tourists tends to divide visitors into a series of simple categories based usually on a single motive such as those mentioned above i.e., business, shopping, visiting friends and relatives, and so on. Page (1995) lists a range of commonly cited motives as follows:

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| - Visiting friends and relatives                  | - Religious travel     |
| - Shopping  | - Business             |
| - Conference and exhibitions                      | - Day visitors         |
| - Education                                       | - Culture and Heritage |
| - Hallmark events (e.g. major sports tournaments) |                        |

However the usefulness of categorising urban tourists according to primary motives for travel is limited. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990), feel such an approach is ultimately inappropriate, as it does not take into account the multimotivated user in the multifunctional city. In other words, visitors to cities have a wide range of motivating factors shaping their visit, and an individual may simultaneously shop, visit friends, and recreate in the same city, on the same trip - moving largely unconsciously between categories.

In addition, Jensen-Verbeke's (1986) study of the usage patterns of the central areas of ten medium and small Dutch market towns, again concludes that classifications such as 'tourist', 'recreationist' or 'shopper' rarely coincide with clear-cut patterns of use of particular urban facilities.

Law (1993) also points out that a person could be attracted to a city for one primary resource such as a museum or a concert; however, he or she could subsequently use other elements as well. Alternatively, tourists come because of the very mix of attractions that are offered. It is likely that for many urban tourists it is the range of opportunities and mixture of resources that is important.

Burtenshaw *et al.* (1991) interestingly point out the relationship between the supply and demand for urban services, and identify the links between the users of the city and the resources which they use. The authors identify the *users* as follows:

- City residents
- City-region residents
- Visitors seeking pleasure from their visit
- Conference visitors
- People working within the city

These users are analysed in terms of their usage of *resources* in the city which are categorised as follows:

- Historic monuments
- Museums and galleries
- Theatres and concert halls
- Night clubs and red-light areas
- Cafes and restaurants
- Shops
- Offices

These users and uses of the city are subsequently categorised under the following headings, the ‘historic city’, the ‘culture city’, the ‘night-life city’, the ‘shopping city’ and the ‘tourist city’. The latter encompasses all of the other functional city categories and their resources.

Ashworth & Tunbridge (1990, p.119) also recognise the importance of residents and day visitors in the urban system and identify four specific types of user in the context of the tourist –historic city:



1. Intentional users from outside the city region, who may be holidaymakers staying in the city or outside it, using the city for excursions – *tourists* and in the case of these resources, quite specifically *Heritage tourists*.
2. Intentional users from inside the city-region, making use of the city's recreational and entertainment facilities or merely enjoying its historic character while engaging in other activities – *Recreating residents*.
3. Incidental users from outside the city-region, which would include most business and congress visitors and those on family visits – *Non-recreating visitors*.
4. Incidental users from inside the city-region, the most numerous group, being ordinary residents going about their ordinary affairs - *Non-recreating residents*.

Such a distinction is clearly useful and demonstrates the “multifunctional” and “multimotivational” aspect of the tourist-historic city. In addition, it shows the importance of how categorisation of users is dependent upon the aspect of use being considered. In other words, it is more helpful to categorise users according to their specific reason in using a particular facility than a general role they have assumed for the visit as a whole (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990).

### **2.4.3 Towards a Profile of Urban Tourists**

As already stated the multifunctional nature of cities and the multimotivational nature of their visitors renders developing a generic urban tourist profile difficult. However, from examining the literature on urban tourism demand we can uncover certain general assumptions about those who visit cities. These will now be discussed.

#### **2.4.3.1 Length of Stay**

Generally people tend to visit cities for short durations. According to Law (1993), a short break holiday is defined as 1-3 nights away from home. He suggests that many visitors would want to visit a city only for a short break (except for the largest cities), as they would be able to achieve all they wanted to do in that time. Moreover, many of the activities in urban settings lend themselves to short visits such as conferences, festivals, concerts and other forms of entertainment. Burtenshaw et al. (1991) believe holiday-makers can grasp the attractions of a

large city in a few days, (usually between 2 and 3 days) and small cities in a matter of hours. This is borne out by many city surveys around Europe. In Dublin, for example, 78% of visitors stayed 4 nights or less in 2002 (Flanagan & Dunne, 2003). Burtenshaw et al. (1991) also observe that, for many visitors, cities (except the largest ones) are only one element in a wider package. Many cities perform a gateway function for visitors' main holidays. Interestingly, this is a view that precedes the city break phenomenon of recent years, where many cities increasingly act as the sole destination for leisure holidays.

Law (1993: 33) believes that cities have not generally targeted the long holidaymaker. With the exception of capital cities like London and Paris, cities have not really appealed to the longer stay market. The short break holiday is often described as supplementary or additional to the main holiday, with the possible exception of visits to friends and relatives. As a supplementary holiday it is thought most likely to be axed in time of recession. However while this may be true for most people, some prefer the short break mode, such as, those whose work commitments do not allow them to take long holidays.

#### ***2.4.3.2 Socio Economic Grouping***

Another perception of urban tourists concerns the socio economic characteristics that they tend to demonstrate. A lot of the urban tourism demand statistics suggest that urban tourists tend to be drawn from the higher socio-economic groupings. British statistics of short break visitors (including city trips) show that short breakers tend to come from the professional and managerial groups (Trinity Research, 1989). This is supported by recent findings in Dublin that show 57% of overseas visitors were made up of white collar workers (this includes professionals and middle management) (Flanagan & Dunne, 2003). However, this does not give a breakdown of the urban tourism market, where individual segments may display different patterns.

#### ***2.4.3.3 Household Composition***

In general, a high proportion of urban tourists travel without children or indeed come from childless households (Trinity Research, 1989). In Dublin, just 13% of visitors came from households with children (Flanagan & Dunne, 2003).

#### **2.4.3.4 *Timing***

Urban tourism demand has a less pronounced seasonal peaking. The flow of visitors to cities is remarkably even throughout the year, in contrast to other types of tourism (Law, 1993, p.168). Urban tourism is less dependent than beach or winter resorts on weather, therefore it is more likely to consist of short breaks throughout the year than a single long summer holiday (Burtenshaw et al. 1991). Law (1993, p.111) points out that unlike the market in seaside resorts, hotels in cities experience only minor seasonal variations in demand.

#### **2.4.3.5 *Distance***

According to Pearce (1987) visitors attracted to the tourist resources of cities travel further than visitors to other sorts of holiday destinations. Burtenshaw et al. (1991) point out that a higher proportion of the total visitors to Western European cities are foreign compared with visitors to inland rural and beach resorts. For example, 86% of visitors to Brussels were foreign, compared with only 9% of visitors to the Belgian coast. They further suggest that cities attract a high proportion of intercontinental as opposed to near neighbour visitors with North Americans in particular dominating in many major cities.

However, this picture of a long distance city tourist - while still partly true - does not reflect the increased growth in recent years of short haul traffic to cities, due mainly to the expansion of low cost air travel and the popularity of city break trips.

#### **2.4.3.6 *Expenditure***

According to Law (1993, p.168) visitors to cities tend to be more affluent and therefore higher spenders. They spend around twice as much per day as visitors to other destinations such as beach resorts. This is a reflection of the relatively high age and socio economic status of visitors attracted to urban heritage, shopping and entertainment facilities. In addition, it indicates the high spend from business and conference visitors. However, again, this perception of a high spending urban tourist does not reflect the low cost visitation patterns that many cities have experienced over the past decade. So, while there is no doubt that a significant number of urban tourists are high spenders, it is important to also acknowledge the growing presence of 'budget' city visitors.

In summary, the overall picture that emerges from the literature describes a short staying (but year round), high spending, hotel based visitor, who has travelled long haul and displays a wide variety of mixed business and pleasure motives. It should be noted that such generalisations from the literature relate essentially to Western Europe and in particular to the major multifunctional world cities that characterise it.

However, it is clear that such a portrayal of urban tourists is unlikely to be representative of many contemporary city visitors today. In reality, urban tourists are as diverse and varied as the cities they visit. A more valuable exercise would be to explore the different visitor segments that make up the urban tourism market. By comparing and contrasting these groups one can get a more accurate picture of distinct nuances in city tourism demand. Such an approach has many benefits, as the following section explores.

## **2.5 Urban Tourism Segmentation**

Blythe (2006, p.176) describes market segmentation as “separating the overall market into groups of customers with similar needs.” The purpose of segmentation is to ensure, as much as possible, that resources are directed at those consumers who are likely to yield the best returns. This involves identifying distinct market segments which may offer potential for the business or organization.

Although the previous section has tried to present some generalised characteristics of urban tourism demand, it is still unclear which distinct market segments exist within the urban tourism sector. It is necessary therefore to investigate further the practice of segmenting tourism demand, and in particular, examining this in an urban tourism context.

### **2.5.1    *Segmentation and Typology***

According to Roberts & Hall (2001), segmentation is a way of understanding the market for a product or service. It is a process whereby an overall market is sub-divided into distinct groups according to personal or social characteristics or recognised buying behaviour. Vanhove (1995) points out that segmentation is very similar to the concept of typology, as mentioned above. Whereas segmentation can be described as a ‘descendant process’ (with the population being split into groups), typology is an ‘ascendant process’. In the latter case the process starts with individuals who are then put together into larger and larger groups, the individuals who form those groups being very similar, and the differences between the groups being the greatest possible.

### **2.5.2    *Why Segment the Market?***

Accurate market segmentation is a goal pursued by many tourism businesses today. Gountas, Carey, & Oppenheim (2000) believe it has become increasingly important for both destinations and tourism suppliers to understand tourists underlying reasons for their product choices and decision making processes. Much segmentation effort is aimed at providing insight into consumers’ tastes, preferences and buying behaviours, in order to be able to position a product or service in an appealing manner. This, as Morgan (1996, p.98) points out should lead to customers being “more satisfied with the product because it has been designed with their needs in mind.”

Verhage & Cunningham (1981) point out a number of factors that have made segmentation increasingly important in the tourism sector including; the growing competitiveness between destinations, increased differentiation in tourist needs, and the potential for economies of scale as a result of concentrating on a particular market (as evident in sun destinations). This cost effectiveness is also highlighted by Middleton (1994, p.73) who claims that segmenting travel and tourism markets is justified, “on the grounds of achieving greater efficiency in the supply of products to meet identified demand, and increased cost-effectiveness in the marketing process.”

Such benefits explain the regular usage of segmentation by travel and tourism businesses. Hotels, for example, differentiate between corporate, family, and group tour guests – while airlines offer different types of seating and services to passengers (including first class, business, and economy). In addition, Destination Marketing Organisations (including city tourism bodies) differentiate visitors in a number of ways. Middleton (1994, p.72) provides the following typical example;

- Local residents in the area
- Day visitors from outside local area
- Domestic tourists
- Foreign tourists
- School parties

Such a simple classification would essentially be of limited value to a destination's tourism industry. More meaningful differentiation would be necessary if real marketing efficiency and effectiveness is to be achieved. It is crucial therefore that marketers choose the right basis on which to segment their potential customers. The following section outlines the main sources of segmentation that are regularly used.

### **2.5.3 Sources of Segmentation**

In order for marketing resources to be used efficiently and effectively, natural segments need to be found that allow separate targeting. Kotler (1994) states that viable segments should satisfy a number of conditions. They should be:

- ◆ *measurable* in terms of size, purchasing power and characteristics;
- ◆ *substantial* enough to be worth targeting;
- ◆ *accessible* by marketing promotional and distribution channels;
- ◆ *differentiable* in terms of how they respond to marketing programmes; and
- ◆ *actionable* by the organisation within the constraints of its budgets and resources

So, on what basis can/should markets be segmented? In tourism there are a variety of options but it is possible to classify the major segmentation variables into five groups, geographic, demographic, socioeconomic, psychographic, and behavioural (particularly benefit segmentation). Each of these will now be briefly outlined.

#### ***2.5.3.1 Geographic Segmentation***

Geographic segmentation involves dividing the total market into segments on the basis of where people come from. Many types of locations can be used: countries, regions, counties, cities, towns and even neighbourhoods. This variable is a very popular and useful form of segmentation in the tourism sector.

#### ***2.5.3.2 Demographic Segmentation***

This covers the external measurable characteristics of a population, such as their age, gender, occupation, income, family size, lifecycle, race and nationality. Silverberg, Backman, & Backman (1996), point out demographic data are the most frequently collected data for identifying the characteristics of travel behaviour.

#### ***2.5.3.3 Socioeconomic Segmentation***

This is mainly based on income, education, occupation, and social class. One of the most commonly used ways of defining a target market in the UK is the socioeconomic grading system developed by the Joint Industry Committee for National Readership Surveys (JICNARS). This classifies people by the occupation of the head of the household into six groups, A,B,C1,C2,D,E. Table 2.1 shows these groupings.

**Table 2.1**  
**Classification of Socioeconomic Grades**

<b><i>Group</i></b>	<b><i>Social Status</i></b>
A	Upper middle class
B	Middle class
C1	Lower middle class
C2	Skilled working class
D	Working class
E	Those at the lowest level of subsistence

#### ***2.5.3.4 Psychographic Segmentation***

Another way markets are segmented is through the use of psychographics - segmentation variables based on consumers' personality characteristics and lifestyle. According to Mill & Morrison (1995) a person's psychographics or lifestyle is derived from his or her personal value system and personality. In contrast to other forms of segmentation, psychographics examine the actual motives for travel behaviour and tries to explain why people travel. Psychographic segmentation is an *a posteriori* type of segmentation in which the segments are obtained after the data analysis has been completed. This is usually done through the administration of psychographic type surveys where a large number of questions are asked about the respondents' attitudes and behaviour. Eventually segments consisting of people who share similar attitudes and behaviour are selected on the basis of results produced by cluster, factor, or some other type of analysis (Witt & Moutinho, 1995). While extensively used in marketing generally, psychographics has also proved useful in understanding tourist's behaviour by examining their activities, interests, attitudes, opinions, perceptions and needs (Silverberg, Backman & Backman, 1996).



#### **2.5.3.5 Behavioural Segmentation**

This method of segmentation focuses on the relationship between the customer and the product, and in particular what the customer wants from the exchange. One of the most useful forms used in tourism is *benefit segmentation*, where people are divided according to the benefits they seek from their purchase. This requires marketers to look closely at customers' needs and expectations. The benefits sought by visitors to a destination may vary considerably, for example, some may seek a very active holiday with a lot of contact with the host population while others may look for isolation and quietness. Benefit segmentation is closely related to *purpose of travel* segmentation, where tourists are divided between a number of simple categories such as day trippers, business travellers and visiting friends and relatives (Page, 1995).

#### **2.5.4 Choosing a Suitable Segmentation Approach**

Each of these methods used to segment tourism demand are not without their limitations. No single method, in isolation has the potential to accurately predict tourist's purchasing behaviour. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses with some being more relevant than others in particular circumstances (Gountas et al. 2000).

Similarly, because the above segmentation groupings are outlined separately, it does not mean that a combination of factors of two or more groups is excluded. On the contrary, in practice a combination is the norm. Traditionally tourism segmentation has relied heavily on the geographic, demographic and socio-economic traits and characteristics of consumers. However, most of the literature now seems to conclude that it may be unwise to use these in isolation to predict tourist consumer behaviour. For example, according to Hassan & Katsanis (1991) the traditional geographic segmentation approach presents three potential limitations, firstly, it is not based on consumer behavioural patterns; secondly, it assumes complete homogeneity of the country segments, and thirdly, it overlooks the existence of homogeneous segments that exist across national boundaries.

Similarly, segmentation based on basic demographic traits such as age can be unreliable. Morgan (1996) points out that people of the same age can behave in very different ways, yet we still fall into the trap of expecting them to conform to stereotypes. He also believes that social grade and class can be unreliable for segmentation purposes, as they tell us merely what an individual *is* according to his work or income and not what he *would like to be*. Thus, although demographic criteria are the most widely applied of all segmentation bases, and are easy to understand and use, care must be taken to ensure their limitations are understood as they may explain little or nothing regarding the behaviour of the segments involved.

Both geographic and demographic segmentation are very common tools used in analysing urban tourism demand. Many cities divide their visitors into countries or regions of origin. This is often combined with age and other demographic factors to give a more meaningful picture of urban tourism demand. However, although such profiles can be useful for city marketers in choosing advertising messages and media coverage, on their own, without the prior analysis of purpose, benefits and user characteristics, they generally prove quite limited when organising effective marketing campaigns (Middleton 2001, p.115).

Many academics and practitioners have been pointing out the value of using psychographic variables as a more accurate segmentation tool in predicting foreign and domestic travel behaviour (Schott, 2002; Silverberg et al., 1996). Psychographics describe the inner psychological characteristics of consumers and thus help to provide a better understanding of the reasons why they choose one product or service over another. In order to get a clearer view of these inner psychological characteristics, a number of instruments have been developed over the years such as VALs (values and lifestyles) and LOV (list of values). The VALs classification, which was originally developed in North America, has been researched by commercial companies and used for many years as a market segmentation technique. It was not designed for tourism but does shed insights on tourism behaviour. It attempts to combine demographic variables with peoples' needs, attitudes and wants. The LOV (list of values) model has also proved to be a popular choice as a market segmentation tool. Schott (2002) uses it in his study of motivation in young holidaymakers. He praises the model's predictive capacity and compact

nature in particular. Such instruments place huge significance on peoples' lifestyles and values and how these can have a bearing on relevant buying behaviour.

Compared to the demographic or geographic categorising of tourism demand, behavioural segmentation is a relatively recent approach to defining markets. Middleton (1994) argues that tourism organisations tend to segment their markets behaviourally by purpose of travel and benefit sought. Applying such a scheme to an urban tourism destination is likely to yield similar categories to those highlighted previously when analysing urban visitors' primary motives, i.e.

- Visiting friends and relatives	- Religious travel
- Shopping	- Business
- Hallmark events	- Conference and exhibitions
- Day visitors	- Education
- Culture and Heritage	

It is clear that all of the above segmentation tools can be potentially useful for tourism businesses. Their application can result in more efficient use of marketing resources and allow for better product planning and management. Urban destinations can and do avail of these marketing techniques, with many cities actively using segmentation strategies on a regular basis. All of the methods of segmentation outlined here are applicable in an urban tourism context with some being more relevant than others, and certain combinations being particularly valuable.

#### ***2.5.4.1 Type of Trip as a Measure for Segmentation***

A number of authors in recent years have emphasised the importance of trip type as a measure for segmenting visitor markets (Sung et al., 2001; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005, Bloy, 2000). This represents one of the most useful yet underutilised means of segmenting tourist markets. Its use in urban destinations could be valuable for city planners and marketers. For example, differentiating between tourists who are on a city break trip, and those who are visiting the city as part of a main (or wider) holiday could provide particularly useful information in relation to the city's tourism demand. Such a segmentation approach focuses on the nature of the trip – its

principal characteristics - and as such offers potentially more valuable visitor behaviour data than the more frequently used 'purpose of visit' approach.

As an increasingly popular 'type of trip,' - the city break - has received very little attention from both academics and practitioners. It is a market niche that has grown rapidly in Europe in recent years and yet very little academic research exists relating to it. The underlying purpose of this investigation is to address this neglect.

## **2.6. The City Break Travel Phenomenon**

One of the most interesting developments in urban tourism demand over the past decade has been the steady increase of city break trip taking. In Europe, city breaks have been one of the strongest growth sectors of the outbound travel market, showing no immediate signs of slowing down. Even post September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 the city breaks market performed much better than the holiday market overall (Trew & Cockrell, 2002). According to IPK International's World Travel Monitor, European city breaks grew by 12% in 2004, compared to an increase of just 5% in sun and beach holidays. This growth has helped to popularise and regenerate several European cities and has assisted in offsetting the seasonality problems encountered by many urban destinations. Unsurprisingly therefore, the city break market's importance and economic value is increasingly being acknowledged by city managers and administrators. However, our knowledge of this important market segment remains relatively poor. Little empirical data specifically relating to city break trip-taking currently exists.

### **2.6.1 Defining a City Break**

One of the difficulties encountered when examining the development of city break tourism is the fact that no commonly recognised definition of what constitutes a city break, currently exists. However, Trew & Cockerell (2002, p.86) point out that the most widely used definition of a city break is, "*a short leisure trip to one city or town, with no overnight stay at any other destination during the trip.*" This definition is a useful one, and importantly, makes the distinction of the trip being 'city only' as opposed to a city visit which is part of a wider holiday. Although it is generally agreed that city breaks consist of leisure trips, the issue of whether this should include

Visiting Friends and Relations (VFR) traffic, is less clear. VFR trips often involve no commercial accommodation and therefore need to be distinguished from commercial city breaks. However, such distinctions are not always clear in city tourism statistics. In fact, one of the main problems in researching the city break market is the paucity of statistics in general on the subject. As Blank (1994, p.181) points out, “every city has tourism, but relatively few cities have definitive information about the nature of their tourism industry.”

### **2.6.2 City Tourism Statistics**

One of the main sources of statistics and data on city tourism in a European context over the past two decades has been the European Travel Monitor. This consists of a continuous survey that has been conducted across Europe since 1988. However, as Cocherell (1997, p.46) highlights, its statistics on city trips refer specifically to the holiday sector, ignoring business and VFR travel and only including international trips involving a minimum stay of one night. Unfortunately most of the data is proprietary and therefore is not always easy to access. Research institutes such as the Institute National pour la Recherche dans les Transports et leur Sécurité (INRETS) in Paris and the Venice based Centro Internazionale di Studi sull Economica Turistica (CISSET) have also been active in producing research data on city tourism. However, as Page (2002, p.120) points out “internationally, most sources of data are destination-specific rather than country- or region-specific.” Thus, although individual cities may produce data, it is difficult to compare them and put them in a regional context. This weakness was one of the main reasons for the development of the Federation of European Cities Tourist Offices (FECTO) Eurocity survey, a research instrument which attempts to standardise the data gathering of city tourism statistics in Europe. The idea was for member cities of FECTO, now known as European Cities Marketing (ECM), to administer a standardised survey in their cities, the results of which are pooled and collated in an attempt to harmonise, for the first time, city tourism data in Europe. This novel initiative has met with mixed success. Although it has yielded some interesting information on city tourism in Europe, the take up in terms of the number of cities administering the survey has been slow. However, it remains one of the few examples of a standardised pan-European data source. As well as the Eurocity survey project, European Cities Marketing provide a wealth of information on city tourism gathered from its members who consist of over 100 city tourist offices around

Europe. This data however is mostly for internal consumption amongst the organisation's members.

## **2.7 Characteristics of City Break Travel**

Two main characteristics are often associated with city break travel - the secondary nature of the trips and the short duration of the stay. Both of these will now be discussed.

### **2.7.1 Short Stay Nature**

One of the most common features of city breaks is the short stay nature of the holidays. Most last between one and three nights. However, according to Trew & Cockerell (2002), city breaks are growing in length, with trips of 4-5 nights or longer growing faster than average. In addition, the length of the city break seems to vary considerably by nationality. For example research shows that Germans tend to take longer city breaks than their European counterparts while the British have a tendency towards shorter trips (Mintel, 2002).

### **2.7.2 City Breaks as Secondary Trips**

Leisure trips to cities tend to be secondary in nature, i.e., complementing the traditional annual summer holiday rather than replacing it. This is an important characteristic according to Trew & Cockerell (2002) who point out that in some European countries overall leisure intensity – i.e. the proportion of the population travelling at least once a year – is reaching a ceiling. At the same time, the total number of trips taken per market continues to grow, as people opt for two or more trips a year in place of, or in addition to, their main annual holiday. Page (2002, p.121) indicates a number of structural changes among the European travelling population that have contributed to the rise in secondary trip taking to urban destinations. These include:

- a) increased holiday and leave entitlements;
- b) the availability of public and national holidays which encourage 'long weekends' that are ideal for short breaks;
- c) rising prosperity from double income families with greater disposable income;

- d) changing perceptions of travel with relative reductions in price, convenience and the availability of transport options, making it a social, psychological and recreational necessity for many; and
- e) time-space compression, where improvements in transport technology (e.g. the advent of high speed trains and the development of regional air services outside of the main national gateway) have made access to destinations for short breaks a reality, avoiding multiple-travel options to national airports.

In addition, Page along with most commentators acknowledges the huge influence that low cost airlines have played in the growth of urban secondary trips.

### **2.7.3 Low Cost Air Travel**

It is generally the case that the closer the destination, the more likely it is that the trip will be made by car – especially for independently organised or non-commercial trips. The further the distance, the more likely it is that air transport will be used. Over the last ten years however, regardless of distance and routes, air transport has consistently gained on private car travel (Trew & Cockrell, 2002). One of the main reasons for this has been the huge growth of low cost airlines throughout Europe. Original ‘no frills’ carriers such as Ryanair and Easyjet have been joined by a plethora of new low cost airlines, flying an increasing number of routes to an increasing number of new destinations. According to the World Travel Market Report 2005, the UK is the most important market in Europe in terms of low fare air trips (18 million in 2004). Table 2.2 shows the rankings for selected markets and the respective shares of low-fare airline trips to total air volume. The figures show this share to be highest in Ireland and Spain, reflecting the importance of the low cost air sector in these countries. The low cost air phenomenon has resulted in much more affordable air transport being available to the public, providing a serious alternative to competing forms of transport for international travel. City break travel has benefited particularly from this as the short stay nature of these trips makes quick access a crucial factor in the success of urban destinations.

**Table 2.2**  
**Low Fare Airline Trips as a Share of Total Air Trip Volume 2004**

<i>Low Fare Trip Volume Rank</i>	<i>Market</i>	<i>Low Fare Share as % of Total Trip Volume</i>
1	UK	40
2	Germany	21
3	France	22
4	Italy	37
5	Netherlands	18
6	Spain	47
7	Russia	14
8	Czech Republic	34
9	Ireland	47

*Source:* IPK International – World Travel Market, 2005.

This fact is acknowledged by the World Travel Market Global Travel Report 2004/05, which states:

*...while sun & beach and touring holidays still dominate European outbound demand, Europe's cities have been enjoying increased business as a result of the growth in low-fare/no-frills airline capacity. Short breaks of one to three nights increased by 24% in volume in the first eight months of 2004, as against a mere 1% growth in long holidays of four nights and over, and a significant share of these were for cities – with smaller, secondary cities gaining most in popularity.*

This last point is an important one as the cities that have tended to benefit most are the ones that traditionally would not have been viewed as tourist destinations, either due to their geographical location or their lack of touristic infrastructure. Low cost air access has put many of these destinations onto the city break map resulting in a whole range of new city destinations for potential travellers. In the UK for example, in recent years there has been a steady trend of growing passenger numbers at a range of regional airports such as Bristol, Liverpool, Humberside and Manchester (Trew & Cockrell, 2002). Indeed, the presence of a low-cost carrier such as Ryanair or Easyjet can often guarantee an injection of new visitors and new routes into a



city or region on a scale that most scheduled airlines could never deliver. Charleroi airport for example, has seen passenger numbers increase almost tenfold to 2 million between 2000 and 2004, largely due to Ryanair's presence (Brussels South Charleroi Airport Statistics, 2006). It is not surprising therefore that many local governments have actively tried to attract low-cost airlines into their localities, often offering extremely attractive operating conditions.

#### **2.7.4 Internet Usage**

Another factor contributing to the expansion of city break travel, and one that is strongly linked to the low cost airline phenomenon, is the relentless growth of internet usage in the tourism industry. The ease with which the public can access information and make bookings through the internet has greatly facilitated city break travel. The uncomplicated nature of most city break trips reduces the risk factor associated with holiday bookings. Many consist of just two components, transport and accommodation, both of which can be easily booked online. This trend is likely to continue given the increased confidence people are gaining in terms of internet bookings. Transport operators and accommodation providers have been quick to capitalize on this with an increasing drive to grow bookings via electronic channels of distribution. Ryanair, for example, sell almost all their seats via the internet. In addition, the introduction of dynamic packaging by a number of electronic intermediaries such as Travelocity and Lastminute.com has further facilitated the ease with which people can package and purchase city breaks online. All of these developments have made the 'do it yourself' approach to holiday bookings more attractive and less complicated for travellers.

#### **2.7.5 City Break Packages**

As well as the 'do it yourself option' consumers are also facing increased availability of city break package holidays by tour operators. These packages are offered by both specialists and the major generalist operators. The range and diversity of city destinations is constantly growing. For example, in their 2002 brochures, two city break operators in the UK, Crystal Holidays and Travelscene, between them offered 75 city-break destinations. In an attempt to compete with the independent booking trend some packages offer travellers a degree of flexibility and choice. For example travellers are sometimes free to select their own transport or to pick from a choice of hotels. There may also be options like local transport tickets, city passes, and tickets to cultural

and sporting events. Unfortunately for tour operators, individual product providers are also offering their own city break packages. Hotels, rail networks, ferry companies and airlines are creating their own packages, thus competing with traditional operators.

Having looked at the characteristics of city break travel and the main reasons for its growth, the attention now turns to a specific destination – namely Dublin – to examine the city break phenomenon from the perspective of one of the major European destinations for such trips.

## **2.8 Dublin as a City Break Destination**

Dublin as a city is relatively small when compared to other European capitals. It occupies a total land area of 117.8 square kilometres and is home to 495,000 people (CSO, 2003). Over the past decade and a half, Dublin has prospered as the city has become increasingly connected into global flows of technology, capital and people. During this time the city has experienced strong increases in visitor arrivals. In fact, only a drop in 2001 interrupted a sequence of year on year growth in overseas visitor numbers that goes back to 1989. Official figures for 2004 show that overseas tourists to Dublin, including non leisure visitors, totalled 3.68 million, contributing over €1.16 billion in tourism revenue. When this figure is broken down further (see Table 2.3), we can see that the number of actual holidaymakers to Dublin totalled 2.06 million – with the British market providing almost half of this total. According to a recent report by Deloitte, Dublin ranks third in Europe behind London and Paris in terms of overnights achieved.

**Table 2.3**  
**Holidaymakers to Dublin by Origin 2004**

	<i>Total Overseas Visitors</i>		<i>Total Overseas Holidaymakers</i>	
	<i>'000s</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>'000s</i>	<i>%</i>
Britain	<b>1,819</b>	<b>49.5</b>	<b>922</b>	<b>44.8</b>
Mainland Europe	<b>965</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>25.4</b>
N. America	<b>644</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>22.8</b>
Other Areas	<b>252</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>6.9</b>
Total	<b>3,680</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,062</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Fáilte Ireland (2005)

The statistics, which were supplied by European Cities Tourism, show that in 2003 Dublin achieved over 18.5 million overnights (see Table 2.4). This is an impressive performance, particularly given the city's size and marketing resources compared to many of the other major urban capitals, and justifiably allows Dublin to rank itself as one of the premier tourism cities in Europe.

**Table 2.4**  
**Top 5 European Cities in Overnights Achieved**

	<b>City</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1	London	91.30	114.80	25.7
2	Paris	31.16	30.87	(0.9)
3	Dublin	15.35	18.63	21.3
4	Rome	12.91	14.46	12.0
5	Berlin	7.24	11.32	56.4

*Source:* European Cities Tourism cited in Deloitte Report (2005)

The reasons behind this impressive tourism performance include a number of factors that will be examined next.

### **2.8.1 Dublin as Capital**

Dublin, as the national capital, encourages a predictable stream of visitors to its government and national institutions. The city is the main focus for the affairs of state and is the country's principal business and financial centre. Dublin, as capital, is also home to Ireland's main cultural institutions including the National Museum, the National Gallery, the National Library, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Chester Beatty Library, and the National Concert Hall. These form a formidable block of cultural attractions that are clearly very popular with visitors to the city. In fact six of the top ten visitor attractions in Dublin represent national cultural institutions (see Table 2.5). Dublin, having served as the nation's capital since medieval times, is also home to most of the country's architecturally important and impressive built environment, including, stately homes, historic houses and Georgian streetscapes.

**Table 2.5**  
**Dublin's Top Attractions**

<i>Top ten Dublin attractions by attendance 2003</i>		
1	Dublin Zoo	772,322
2	Guinness Storehouse	738,000
3	* The National Gallery of Ireland	706,000
4	Trinity College / Book of Kells	467,513
5	* Irish Museum of Modern Art	309,000
6	St Patrick's Cathedral	275,922
7	* National Museum of Archaeology & History	260,000
8	* National Museum of Decorative Arts	136,868
9	* Chester Beatty Library	134,161
10	* Natural History Museum	118,705

*Source:* Adapted from Fáilte Ireland Statistics

In addition, the city holds a number of clear advantages in terms of its cultural past. As a result of being the main centre of learning in Ireland throughout history, Dublin possesses a rich literary tradition, a fact that now forms a central role in the city's marketing and branding. Dublin is also the principal transport node for the country and as such, acts as a gateway and the premier point of access for international visitors. As Table 2.6 shows, Dublin airport far exceeds the two other major airports, Cork and Shannon, in terms of passenger numbers. Importantly for the city, an increasing proportion of these passengers are visiting Dublin only, as opposed to those just passing through. As McManus (2001, p.104) points out "in the past, it was common for arriving tourists to leave the city almost immediately in search of the much-promoted green idyll. However, increasingly, tourist arrivals are staying longer in the Capital and may not travel elsewhere." Dublin sees itself as a stand alone place product, increasingly competing with other European capital cities, rather than other regions of Ireland. Its compact core and its variety of entertainment and cultural pursuits make it an attractive tourist destination, worthy of visiting in its own right.

**Table 2.6**  
**Passenger Numbers at Ireland's Three Main Airports**

<i><b>Airport</b></i>	<i><b>2005</b></i>	<i><b>2004</b></i>	<i><b>% Change</b></i>
Dublin	18.5 m	17.1 m	+ 8%
Shannon	3.3 m	2.4 m	+ 38%
Cork	2.7 m	2.3 m	+ 21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.5 m</b>	<b>21.8 m</b>	<b>+12%</b>

*Source:* Aer Rianta

### **2.8.2 Changing Holiday Patterns**

One of the main reasons for Dublin's success over the past 10 years has been its ability to take advantage of the changing holiday pattern of European travellers. According to McManus (2001) changes in people's preferences have seen a move from mass consumption of standardised holiday products towards more specialised niche-market holidays involving culture and heritage, active pursuits and festivals and events. In addition to this general trend towards niche products,

there has been a noticeable move towards weekend and short break holidays. In this context, Dublin, along with many other similar cities in Europe, has benefited greatly, by positioning itself as an attractive destination for such trips.

### **2.8.3 *Dublin as a Fashionable Destination***

Dublin has also benefited from a perception that it is a fashionable place to visit. It is difficult to identify the exact cause of this but certainly factors such as the association with U2, the success of Riverdance (and its spin offs), and the recognition of certain Irish films have all contributed in some way to a more vibrant image for the city. In addition, the hosting and staging of a number of high profile events over the past decade including, the MTV Europe Music awards, the Cutty Sark Tall Ships race and the Special Olympics has helped substantially in terms of the promotion and marketing of the city. The reinventing of the annual St. Patrick's Day parade as a five day festival with a much larger programme of events and activities has also attracted more visitors at a crucial time of the year.

In addition, Dublin's recent economic prosperity with its consequent employment opportunities has acted as a magnet for a new generation of Irish youth. This has resulted in what Lennon & Seaton (1998, p.150) describe as, "a capital with a predominantly youthful profile that reinforces its fashionability and vibrancy in areas such as music and style." There is no doubt that this has added, in a positive way, to the image of the city.

## **2.9 Criticism of Dublin as a Tourism Destination**

All these factors have contributed to the increased popularity of Dublin as a destination, and in particular, as a stand alone destination, separate from Ireland. However the city has also received a certain amount of criticism in recent years. One of the main concerns at present is the cost associated with holidaying in the city. Statistics in recent years have shown high prices as being one of the key negative perceptions of the city by visitors (Flanagan & Dunne, 2003). This is a problem that city marketers and planners are aware of and remains a key issue facing the sustainability of Dublin as a tourist destination.

Another criticism that the city has received concerns its perceived domination of the inbound tourism market at the expense of other parts of the country. Ireland's Regional Tourism Authorities, particularly those along the western seaboard, have voiced serious concerns regarding the changing trip-taking behaviour of visitors that has resulted in the growth of short breaks over more traditional longer stay holidays. This trend has invariably benefited Dublin, but it does so, at the expense of other parts of the country (ITIC, 2005).

## **2.10 Summary**

This section of the literature review has shown that, following many years of neglect, urban tourism is finally emerging as an important and distinct tourism discipline. This is evident from the attention it has received – particularly in the past decade – from academics, industry practitioners and government organisations. However, the complexity of cities as tourist destinations makes generalising about their tourists more difficult than is the case for other destinations. Added to this complexity, visitation patterns to many cities have changed substantially in recent years through the growth in low cost air travel and the subsequent popularity of city breaks. This has been one of the most significant developments in European tourism in the past decade. City break travel has outperformed most other types of trip taking and shows no sign of declining.

This development has, at a certain level, fundamentally changed the structure and make up of urban tourism demand in many cities. A number of previously held assumptions about urban tourists and their behaviour patterns are no longer valid or relevant. This calls for rethinking our perceptions on how we segment tourism demand. A new model may be required in order to represent the growing city break phenomenon. The literature suggests differentiating urban tourists according to their type of trip may be more relevant and helpful than some of the more traditional segmentation techniques. Such an approach would allow the city break segment to be properly identified and examined.

This would be timely as relatively little information on the characteristics and travel behaviour of this important tourism segment exists. City tourism statistics rarely differentiate city break visitors from other leisure tourists. Much of the commentary on this topic tends to be based on anecdotal experience rather than on empirical evidence. Moreover, academic research on the development of city break travel as a sub-segment of urban tourism practically doesn't exist. This research aims to redress this by specifically identifying city break visitors to Dublin and comparing them to other leisure visitors in an attempt to explore their distinctiveness as a visitor segment.

As well as examining distinctiveness in terms of visitor profile and trip characteristics the research will closely focus on the important topics of motivation and decision making. These are crucial areas to explore in order to allow a better understanding of urban tourism demand patterns. They are therefore the main themes examined in the following chapter.



# Chapter Three

## A Review of Tourist Motivation and Consumer Behaviour

### 3.1 Introduction

The principal aim of this research is to explore the motivation and decision making involved in purchasing a city break trip. In order to get a clearer understanding of how and why tourists choose such travel products it is necessary to firstly examine the subject of consumer behaviour. A considerable amount of research has been carried out on motivations and reasons for travelling, and about the way in which potential travellers choose among the many travel opportunities open to them (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Woodside & King, 2000; Chon, 1989; Crompton, 1979, 1992; Decrop, 1999a; Goodall, 1991; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Sirakaya & McLellan, 1997; Teare, 1992; Woodside & King, 2000). Such research has its roots in the area of consumer behaviour. Blackwell, Miniard & Engel (2001, p.6) define consumer behaviour as the “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services.” Thus, the study of consumer behaviour focuses on how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items. That includes *what* they buy, *why* they buy it, *when* they buy it, *where* they buy it, *how often* they buy it, and how often they *use* it.

### 3.2. Historical View of Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is recognized as a core principle of modern marketing. It allows marketers an insight into how buyers establish a need for the product, how they identify and evaluate options, and what factors can influence their decision-making and ultimate choice. More and more businesses are seeing the value of understanding and potentially predicting their customer's behaviour. Engel et al. (1995) highlight the importance of research in understanding consumer motivation and behaviour, contributing as it does to reducing the risks of marketing failure. The study of consumer behaviour as a separate marketing discipline really took off when marketers realised that consumers did not always act or react as marketing theory suggested they would. According to Shiffman and Kanuk (2000) consumer behaviour evolved as a discipline in the mid to late 1960s. Because it had little in the way of history or a body of research of its own, its theorists borrowed heavily from concepts developed in other scientific disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, social psychology, economics and anthropology. Many early theories

concerning consumer behaviour were based on economic theory, on the notion that individuals act rationally to maximize their benefits (satisfactions) in the purchase of goods and services. Later research discovered that consumers are just as likely to purchase impulsively, and to be influenced not only by family, friends, advertisers and role models, but also by mood, situation and emotion. Cooper et al. (1998, p.51) identify three phases that characterise the development of consumer behaviour theory:

1. The Early Empiricist Phase covered the years between 1930 and the late 1940s and was dominated by empirical commercial research. This research was characterized by attempts in industry to identify the effects of distribution, advertising and promotion decisions. The basis for these models came mainly from economic theories relating to the company.
2. The Motivational Research Phase in the 1950s was an age where stress was placed on Freudian and drive-related concepts. There was a greater emphasis placed upon in-depth interviews, focus groups, thematic apperception tests and other projective techniques. Activity was directed at uncovering 'real' motives for action which were perceived to lie in the deeper recesses of the consumer's mind.
3. The Formative Phase of the 1960s can be seen as the determining years of consumer behaviour modelling. The first general consumer behaviour textbook became available in 1968 (Engel, Kollat & Blackwell) and other influential books such as Howard & Sheth (1969) followed soon after. During the formative phase, models of behaviour proved useful as a means of organizing disparate knowledge of social action. The major theorists developed 'Grand Models' of consumer behaviour which have been subsequently utilized or transformed by authors interested in the tourism choice process. Some of these models are examined later in this chapter and their relevance to travel behaviour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is reviewed.

Today, consumer behaviour as a discipline, occupies a central position in modern marketing planning and application. Indeed, its role in the contemporary era is as relevant (if not more so)

as ever. Engel et al (1995, p.23) indicate a number of recent challenges that face marketers and how consumer research finds itself “on some new playing fields.” For example, the authors point out that “markets that were large and homogeneous are increasingly breaking into smaller and smaller segments identified by different buyer needs and expectations.” In addition, they point out changes occurring in relation to the amount of time and effort people put into purchase decisions. They note how “carefully thought through, reasoned decisions are giving way to low involvement behaviour.”

These and many other challenges in the contemporary era necessitate the continued development of consumer behaviour research. Such research allows marketers crucial knowledge of their customers, which is vital if they want to remain competitive. A useful suggestion for the focus of future inquiry is given by Dibb & Simkin (2001, p. 31) who highlight five key areas of knowledge which companies need to know about their customers. They maintain, in order to be successful, a marketer should be able to:

- (a) profile and describe the target consumers;
- (b) identify their key customer values and needs;
- (c) understand who else – family members, friends, colleagues – might be involved in the decision-making process and in conducting the purchase;
- (d) identify the stages of the buying decision-making process in the case of their product or service;
- (e) properly comprehend the influencing factors at play during the decision- making.

Such an approach to consumer behaviour appears sensible and importantly represents the key areas that this research intends to uncover in relation to the city break market.

### 3.3 Modelling the Purchase Decision Making Process

As research into consumer behaviour developed and the subject evolved into a distinct discipline, new approaches were offered to describe and explain what influenced consumer's actions. These contemporary views were quite different from previous models because of their concentration on the actual decision process that consumers go through when deliberating about products and services. Therefore, contrary to the economic models, emphasis was placed on the mental activity that occurs before, during and after purchases are made, thus highlighting the increased usage of research findings from psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology as well as economics (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993).

Consumer behaviour models generally reflect an effort to order and integrate the various factors involved in the purchase decision making process. They range from fairly simple relationships between independent and dependent variables to highly complex, comprehensive models of consumer behaviour. Runyon and Stewart (1987, p.698) criticise some of the models as being “primitive and ineffective in predicting human behaviour,” and consisting of “little more than elaborate flowcharts designed to reflect the various factors influencing consumer behaviour, without providing an adequate method for evaluating the relative importance of the variables involved.” However, the authors do concede that despite their shortcomings, many of the existing models also have merit, mainly for the following reasons:

- they encourage systematic thinking by forcing the theorists to define the relevant elements in a behavioural theory,
- they make explicit the interrelationship between these variables, thereby offering a tentative explanation of behavioural phenomena,
- they provide a framework for testing hypotheses derived from the model and for incorporating new findings into an integrated system and,
- they sometimes permit simulation of behaviour, so that the implications of the model can be observed under different sets of assumptions.

Similarly, Chisnall (1985) recognizes both the limitations and the value of these consumer behaviour models. While acknowledging the difficulty and ambiguity surrounding certain characteristics of the models, he concludes that they have generally given valuable insight into the factors which affect consumer buying behaviour. In addition, he welcomes the fact that they show the consumer, not as a mere pawn, but as an active processor of data who has the ability to reject as well as accept products. Ultimately these models can present a unified view of what is known about consumer behaviour and help identify what remains to be explored. This allows researchers to contribute to knowledge by selecting the most important aspects of consumer behaviour for analysis and testing.

In the following pages, a number of prominent models of buyer behaviour are presented and reviewed. The initial models relate to consumer behaviour in general, while the latter ones relate to decision making in a tourism context. The general models include some initial attempts to conceptualise the consumer decision making process, including some of the ‘grand models’ of the early researchers. The tourism models represent a variety of attempts to explain the travel decision process. These range from early attempts by Schmoll (1977) and Middleton (1988) to more recent offerings by Woodside & King (2001) and Ryan (2002).

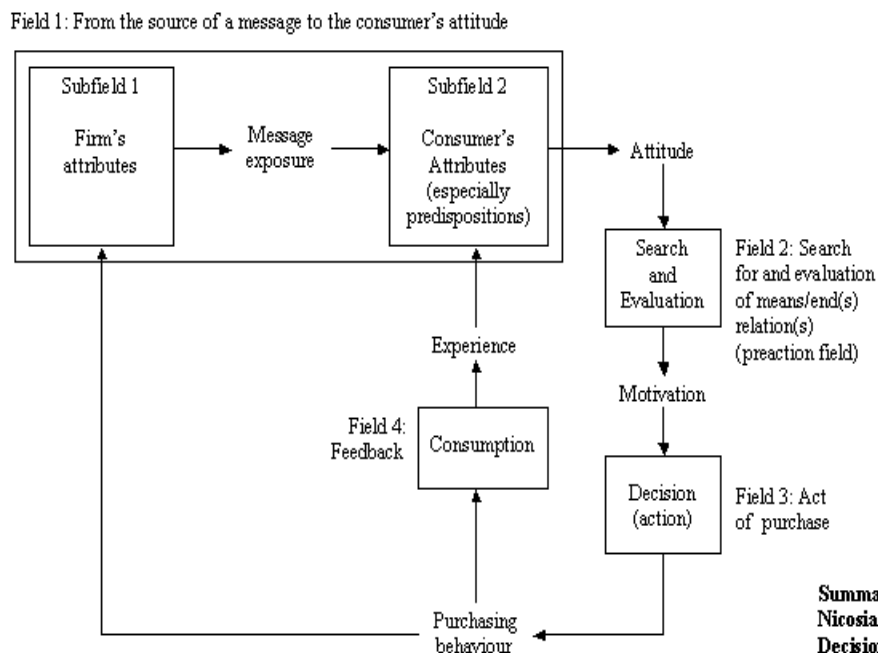
### **3.3.1 General Models of Consumer Behaviour**

The first three examples to be presented show the early pioneering models proposed by Nicosia (1966), Howard & Sheth (1969), and Engel et al. (1968). These three models are considered the grand models of consumer behaviour, and as Teare (1994) points out were instrumental in identifying and defining components of the decision process and the nature of relationships which may occur during that process. Gilbert (1991) suggests that these grand models share six common features. First, they consider consumer behaviour to be a constant decision-making process. Second, the behaviour of the individual consumer is emphasized. Third, behaviour is treated as a functional concept that can be explained. Fourth, a buyer is viewed as an individual who searches, evaluates, and stores information. Fifth, buyers narrow down the range of information over time, and choose from the alternatives they developed during the decision-making process. Sixth, feedback from the final purchase is included in the models to emphasise the effect of the decision on future purchases.

### 3.3.1.1 The Nicosia Model

The first of these models was developed by Francesco Nicosia in 1966. This model focused on the relationship between the firm and its potential consumers, where the firm tries to influence consumers, and the consumers - by their actions (or inaction) - influence the firm. A distinctive feature of Nicosia's approach was the shift of emphasis away from the purchasing act itself, and towards the decision processes which take place both before and after this act.

**Figure 3.1**  
**The Nicosia Model**



**Summary Flowchart of the  
Nicosia Model of Consumer  
Decision Processes**

*Source: Francesco M. Nicosia  
Consumer Decision Processes  
(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice  
Hall, 1966), 156. Used by  
permission of the author.*

In particular, it attempts to highlight the interrelationships between a firm's marketing communications, the attributes of the consumer, the consumer's decision process, and the feedback.

The Nicosia model is divided into four main fields, the interrelationships of which are shown in the form of a flow chart. A simplified diagram of the model is shown in Figure 3.1.

- Field 1: represents the consumer's attitude based on exposure to the firm's message. This highlights the firm's attempts to communicate with the consumer, and the consumer's predisposition to act in a certain way.
- Field 2 represents the consumer's product search and evaluation stage. This involves the search for relevant information and evaluation of the firm's brand in comparison with alternative brands. The output of this stage is motivation to purchase the firm's product.
- Field 3 corresponds to the act of purchase and involves the actual buying of the product from a specific retailer.
- Field 4 consists of the post-purchase feedback process. This involves two important types of feedback: one to the firm by way of sales data, and the other to the consumer in the form of experience (satisfaction or dissatisfaction).

The Nicosia model is generally regarded as a pioneering attempt to consolidate knowledge about consumer behaviour. Loudon & Della Bitta (1993) point out that its emphasis on the consumer as a conscious and deliberative decision maker was novel, as was its contribution of the 'funnel approach' which views consumers as moving from general product knowledge toward specific brand knowledge. In addition, Runyon & Stewart (1987) acknowledge that the model remains one of the few which attempts to incorporate explicitly the actions of a firm within a model of consumer behaviour.

However, the Nicosia model is not without its shortcomings and has also received criticism. Lunn (1971) points out that the model has a tendency to represent the search and evaluation process as 'over-rational,' thus making it more applicable to infrequently purchased expensive products rather than frequently purchased low cost goods. He also questions the model's definitions of variables such as attitudes and motivation. Loudon & Della Bitta (1993) also point to the limiting assumption that the consumer begins the decision process with no predispositions regarding the involved firms. The model also fails to examine a rejection scenario i.e. it assumes



a positive response from the customer. However, one of the most serious criticisms of the model stems from the fact that it was not empirically tested. Nevertheless, despite these and many other limitations, the model was pioneering in its influence on how others would attempt to understand and explain consumer behaviour.

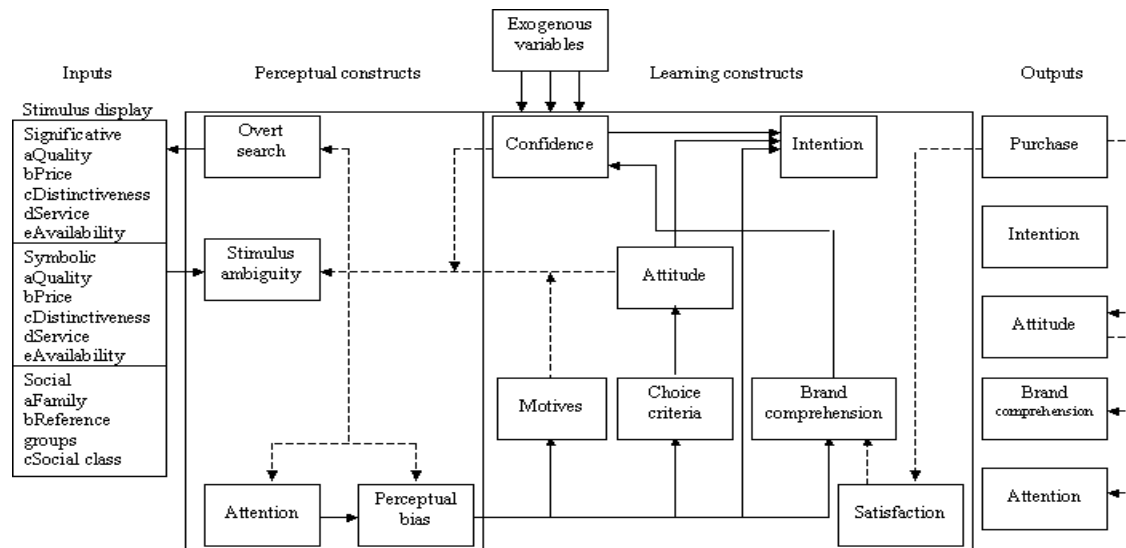
### **3.3.1.2 Howard-Sheth Model**

Probably the most commonly referred to model of consumer behaviour is Howard-Sheth's model of buyer behaviour which was developed in 1969. It represented a major revision of an earlier effort by John Howard to develop a comprehensive theory of consumer decision making. According to Runyon & Stewart (1987, p.704) the Howard-Sheth model is "one of the most painstakingly constructed contemporary models of consumer behaviour." It attempts to depict rational brand choice behaviour by buyers under conditions of incomplete information and limited abilities. It highlights the importance of *inputs* to the consumer buying process, and suggests ways in which the consumer orders these inputs prior to making a final decision. The model, shown in Figure 3.2, is made up of four main sets of variables. These are:

- (1) *Inputs*: The model shows three different types of input variables, *significant* stimuli, which refers to physical brand characteristics; *symbolic* stimuli, relating to verbal or visual product characteristics and *social* stimuli which consists of the consumer's family, reference groups and social class.
- (2) *Perceptual and Learning Constructs*: This section of the model deals with the psychological variables involved when consumers are contemplating a decision. Stimulus ambiguity occurs if a consumer is unclear about the meaning of messages received from his/her environment. Perceptual bias relates to the practice engaged in by some consumers in which they distort the information received so that it fits his/her established needs or experiences. Learning constructs serve the function of concept formation. Included in this category are the consumer's goals, information about brands in the evoked set, criteria for evaluating alternatives, preferences, and buying intentions.
- (3) *Outputs*: In addition to the actual purchase the outputs shown by the model include a number of variables which correspond in name to the previous stage, namely, attention, brand comprehension, attitudes, intention.

- (4) *Exogenous Variables:* Exogenous variables include, importance of the purchase, personality traits, time pressure, and financial status. These variables are not directly part of the decision-making process and are not shown in the model presented here.

**Figure 3.2**  
**The Howard-Sheth Model**



The Howard-Sheth model of buyer behaviour  
Source: Howard and Sheth (1969)

The Howard-Sheth model is generally regarded as making a significant contribution to understanding consumer behaviour. Its value lies in its attempt to identify and organise the major variables influencing consumers and how they interact with each other. It depicts the consumer as actively seeking information from the environment, using past experience, and forming generalisations as a guide to decision making. In addition, according to Runyon & Stewart (1987), the model recognises different types of consumer problem solving and information-search behaviours, with its dynamic design reflecting the complexity of consumer behaviour.

Although widely acclaimed, the Howard-Sheth model does have limitations, and does not explain all buyer behaviour. Loudon & Della Bitta (1993) argue that the model does not make sharp distinctions between exogenous and other variables. They also claim the model has limited generality and is not applicable in all situations, for example, it is not very useful in explaining joint decision making scenarios. Although the Howard-Sheth model has been tested empirically on a number of occasions the results have been patchy and rather disappointing overall in terms of supporting the model. Runyon & Stewart (1987, p.706) point out some of the reasons for this:

*Operational definitions of many of the variables in the model are difficult to construct and there is some question about whether the operational definitions used in various tests of the model are reasonable translations of the theoretical constructs used in the model.... Relationships among variables also appear to be more complex than was initially thought. Some relationships appear to be nonlinear, rather than linear, and complex feedback loops appear to exist. These latter problems not only create technical problems for analysis, they also make it difficult to establish the direction of causality.*

Importantly, the authors also criticised the model for its inaccurate assumption that all consumer purchase activity follows a high-involvement, cognitive process – a weakness that most of the traditional models exhibited.

Despite its shortcomings the Howard-Sheth model represents a considerable effort to improve our understanding of consumer behaviour. It has also evolved as new information has become available and remains a significant point of reference for all consumer behaviour researchers.

### **3.3.1.3 Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model**

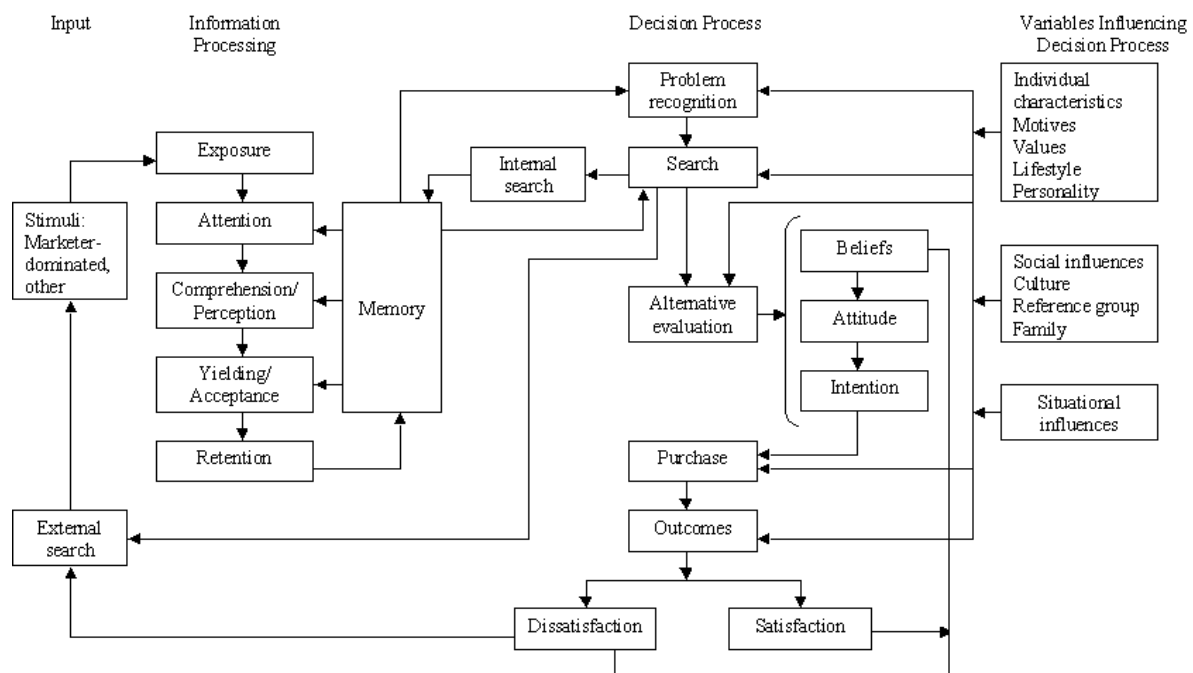
One of the best known of the contemporary models is the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model (also known as the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell). This comprehensive model originated in 1968, and like the Howard-Sheth model, it has undergone a number of revisions aimed at improving its descriptive capability and clarifying basic relationships between different components. One of the models main merits is its ability to synthesize and coordinate relevant concepts into a significant whole. Blackwell et al. (2001, p.71) state that this model “represents a roadmap of consumers’ minds that marketers and managers can use to help guide product mix,

communication and sales strategies.” The model, depicted in Figure 3.3, essentially consists of four sections:

1. Information input,
2. Information processing,
3. Decision process stages,
4. Variables influencing the decision process.

The input section consists of information from both marketing and non marketing sources which the consumer experiences. These feed into the information processing section of the model where the information is given meaning. The many factors which can influence the decision process are represented in section four which consists of individual characteristics, social influences and situational influences. At the core of the model however is the ‘decision process’ section.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Engel Blackwell Miniard Model**



**The Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (Engel-Blackwell-Minard) Model of customer behavior.**

This is made up of five basic decision process stages: need recognition, search for information, alternative evaluation, purchase, and outcomes. The extent to which each of these stages are used by consumers will depend on the nature of the purchase. The authors recognized two distinct types of purchase behaviour. One was extended problem solving behaviour (EPS), which is characterised by high levels of involvement and/or high levels of perceived risk. In this situation consumers are more likely to pass through all five stages. The second behaviour type was limited problem solving behaviour (LPS) where the consumer operates under low levels of involvement and/or low levels of perceived risk. In this situation no active decision process occurs. The consumer conducts minor or no information search and has little motivation to engage in rigorous evaluation of alternatives. The authors argue that the same basic model can be used to represent both EPS and LPS consumer behaviour. The difference is characterised by the *degree* to which the various stages in the model will be used by consumers.

Chisnall (1985, p.168) describes the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model as “a very helpful projection of consumer buying behaviour.” Loudon & Della Bitta (1993) concur and point to a number of strengths which the model presents. Chief among these is the clarity and flexibility which the model offers (one of the main reasons attributed to the model’s popularity). They also praise the models emphasis on the decision making process regarding purchases which nicely lends itself to analysis and testing. The authors assert that the primary drawback of the model lies in its vagueness in relation to the role of some variables. For example, environmental variables are noted as being influential in the model, however their role in affecting behaviour is not well specified. In addition, the model has been criticized as being somewhat mechanistic in its treatment of the decision process. Its standing as a theory is also questioned by Sternthal & Craig (1982) who claim it is inadequate in this regard because it does not specify the preconditions under which certain outcomes will emerge.

However, despite these limitations, the model continues to provide a very comprehensive framework for understanding the intricacies of consumer decision making. And because it has been updated regularly to reflect new findings and information relating to the behaviour of consumers it continues to be of significant relevance today.

### 3.3.1.4 Solomon Model

Taking a different perspective from the grand models Solomon (1996) suggested a model from the marketer's perspective. In a simple model (Figure 3.4) he addresses some of the issues that arise at different stages in the consumption process. He also highlights the presence of many different people in the purchasing process - where the purchaser and the user might not be the same person.

**Figure 3.4**  
**Some Issues that arise during Stages in the Consumption Process**

	<i>Consumer's Perspective</i>	<i>Marketer's Perspective</i>
<b><i>Pre-purchase Issues</i></b>	How does a consumer decide that he/she needs a product? What are the best sources of information to learn more about alternative choices?	How are consumer attitudes toward products formed and/or changed? What cues do consumers use to infer which products are superior to others?
<b><i>Purchase issues</i></b>	Is acquiring a product a stressful or pleasant experience? What does the purchase say about the consumer?	How do situational factors, such as time pressure or store displays affect the consumer's purchase decision
<b><i>Post-purchase issues</i></b>	Does the product provide pleasure or perform its intended function? How is the product eventually disposed of?	What determines whether a consumer will be satisfied with a product and whether he/she will buy it again? Does this person tell others about his/her experiences with the product and affect their purchase decisions?

*Source:* Solomon (1996)

There can be no doubt that the models devised by Nicosia, Howard & Sheth, and Engel, Blackwell & Miniard have been hugely influential in advancing the knowledge of consumer behaviour. However, attempts to validate the models have met with only limited success. Indeed, in their attempt to include all the permutations and circumstances involved in the purchase

decision, most of the general models have become irrelevant for a number of specific products and services. Teare (1994, p.15) argues that decision model research is of limited appeal to practitioners because they find many of the empirical approaches too complex and irrelevant to their particular circumstances. He goes on to point out “the need to enhance theoretical and practical understanding of consumer decision making in specific product fields and situations.” Given the uniqueness of certain products and purchasing situations this approach has been embraced by many specialist consumer behaviour researchers in recent years. This marks a movement away from a ‘one model fits all’ approach, to one where differences in purchasing behaviour are not only acknowledged but sought out. Such an approach seems wise given the diversity of contemporary consumer products, the changing nature of purchasing patterns, and a global marketplace where consumer behaviour is constantly evolving.

Travel and tourism represents a good example of a sector that is characterised by specific consumer behaviour patterns. The travel purchase is considered to be quite unique in many ways, and as such, has received a significant amount of attention from researchers in recent years. This attention is outlined in the following section where various attempts by academics to model the travel decision process are presented. The models include some, such as Schmoll, which are based on the grand models mentioned previously, and others, such as Middleton, which depict the process in a more distinctive way. The relevance and suitability of these models to the specifics of the city break travel decision is also discussed. However, the section will begin by examining the tourism product itself, in an effort to highlight the specific characteristics which are commonly associated with it, and which in turn influence and impact on the purchasing behaviour of consumers.

### **3.4 Consumer Behaviour and Tourism**

Efforts to understand how people consume travel and tourism products and unveil the determinants that shape travel behaviour have become a significant focal point in tourism research over the past two decades. Tourism as a service poses many issues in terms of consumer behaviour. While there are many tangible items associated with it, the tourism product is largely a series of experiences. These experiences usually consist of intangible benefits, such as a sense of well-being, mental and physical recuperation, development of personal interests such as culture, or revived relationships (Middleton, 2001). The tourism product is thus an amalgam of several products and services, the individual components of which are usually supplied by different organisations, both private and public sector. A package holiday, for example, will usually consist of various mixes of transport, accommodation and sightseeing services. On a wider scale, the destinations which are visited by travellers can be considered to be products in their own right, since it may well be the attractiveness of the destination that prompted the desire to travel in the first place (Youell, 1998). Some take it a step further and believe that the tourism product consists of all aspects of the trip. For example, Medlik & Middleton (1973) state that as far as the tourist is concerned, the product covers the complete experience from the time he leaves home to the time he returns to it. We can see therefore that the tourism product is a complex and multifaceted concept and one that can be viewed from a number of perspectives.

#### **3.4.1 *Characteristics of the Tourism Product***

The tourism literature regularly refers to the tourism product as being different from other products, including other service products. It is commonly associated with a number of characteristics that often have a bearing on its purchase. These characteristics will now be examined. Firstly, the tourism product is commonly regarded as being a high involvement purchase. This means that behaviour patterns during purchase are not routinised - with each purchase situation showing different approaches and behaviour. Customers are likely to undertake extensive search behaviour before making their final choice. Laws (2002) suggests four reasons which account for tourists experiencing a high degree of involvement in choosing their holiday destination.



- 1) Holidays tend to be expensive, thus presenting significant financial risk if things go wrong.
- 2) Holidays are complex purchases which require a lot of research and reflection.
- 3) There is a risk that the resort/destination may not prove satisfying which could have considerable emotional significance for the decision maker, particularly in the case of family holidays.
- 4) The resort/destination reflects the holidaymaker's personality.

Another commonly perceived view of the tourism product concerns the *long lead in time* before consumption. Many holiday decisions are still made over quite a significant time period. This means that the decision requires people to predict what they want to do in the future as well as try to forecast their personal circumstances at the time of the trip.

The tourism purchase is also complicated by the role that *other people*, particularly friends and family, play in the purchase decision. Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) point out that this makes tourism consumer behaviour patterns very complex and difficult to study.

Another characteristic that is often associated with tourism products is *sensitivity of demand*. Many tourism goods are perceived as being non-necessity purchases and therefore tend to be quite sensitive to price. This means economic conditions such as recession, inflation, and taxation can play a significant role in the demand for travel and tourism products.

The industry is also sensitive to occurrences and *events in the external environment* such as terrorism, natural disasters, political instability, and other external factors. These are usually events that are outside the control of individual businesses but can nonetheless have a dramatic effect on their profits or indeed survival.

*Seasonality of demand* is also closely associated with tourism purchases. Many tourism businesses demonstrate seasonal demand patterns, e.g. ski resorts, holiday centres and sightseeing tours. This factor is closely associated with another characteristic of tourism products, *perishability*. In common with other service industries, tourism consists of products

that are perishable by nature, i.e. they have a limited 'shelf life'. If a hotel room or an airplane seat is not sold, it cannot be stored or saved and sold at a later date. This results in the loss of potential revenue from such sales. Many tourism firms try to counteract this by using tactical pricing techniques.

It is important to note that many of these characteristics are based on a traditional view of the tourism product. Such a view does not take into account significant changes that have occurred in recent years in relation to the changing nature and cost of travel products. Factors such as the internet and the availability of last minute deals have altered the way in which travel products are both perceived and purchased. It is important therefore to examine in detail the elements and characteristics of tourism decision making, in order to ensure a more accurate picture of contemporary purchasing behaviour is understood.

### **3.4.2    *The Tourism Decision Making Process***

From this examination of the tourism product it is clear that the travel buying decision is anything but a straightforward process. As Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) point out "the diverse and interdependent characteristics of many tourism products make the purchase decision in tourism a complex phenomenon in its own right." Nonetheless, many researchers have examined this issue and tried to provide some understanding of tourism purchase behaviour. One of the most well known attempts was by Luiz Moutinho (1987). His extensive examination of consumer behaviour in tourism has proved very insightful for many subsequent researchers. He presented a model that was derived from both general decision making assumptions and published research relating to consumer behaviour in tourism. Three behavioural elements underpin his travel purchase concept: motivation, cognition and learning. Moutinho posits that purchase motives initiate the sequence of behavioural events, cognition activates mental processing, and learning causes subsequent changes in behaviour.

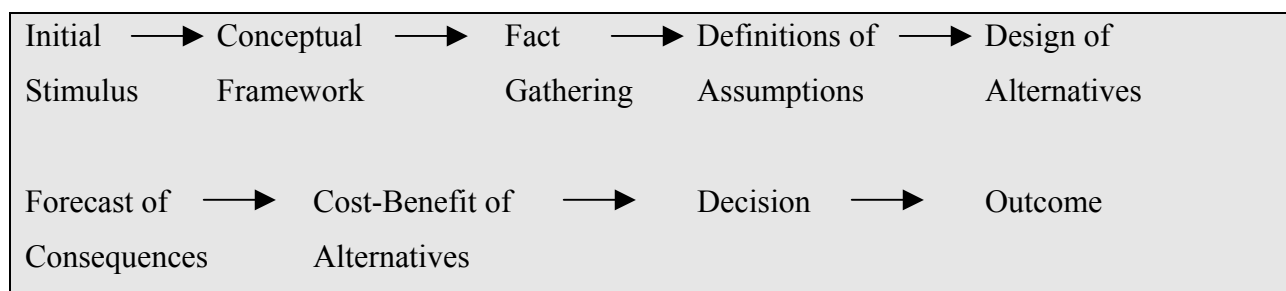
### 3.4.2.1 Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield Model

One of the earliest efforts to shed light on the tourism purchase decision was made by Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield (1976). The authors recognized that the purchase of a holiday is unique in that there is:

- (a) no tangible return on investment,
- (b) considerable expenditure in relation to earned income,
- (c) a purchase that is not spontaneous, and
- (d) an expenditure that involves saving and preplanning.

They presented the tourist purchase decision in a series of stages much like some of the preceding models. These stages are outlined in the flow chart in Figure 3.5. This view of the holiday purchase sees the tourist as taking a number of steps in the buying process. The authors believed that all decision making goes through these steps regardless of whether it is instantaneous or protracted over a number of years.

**Figure 3.5**  
**The Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield Model of Consumer Behaviour**



*Source:* Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield (1976)

However it excluded the possibility of purchases made on impulse or on a whim. Importantly, Swarbrooke & Horner (1999) question the validity of this, given the rise in ‘last minute’ holidays in recent years.

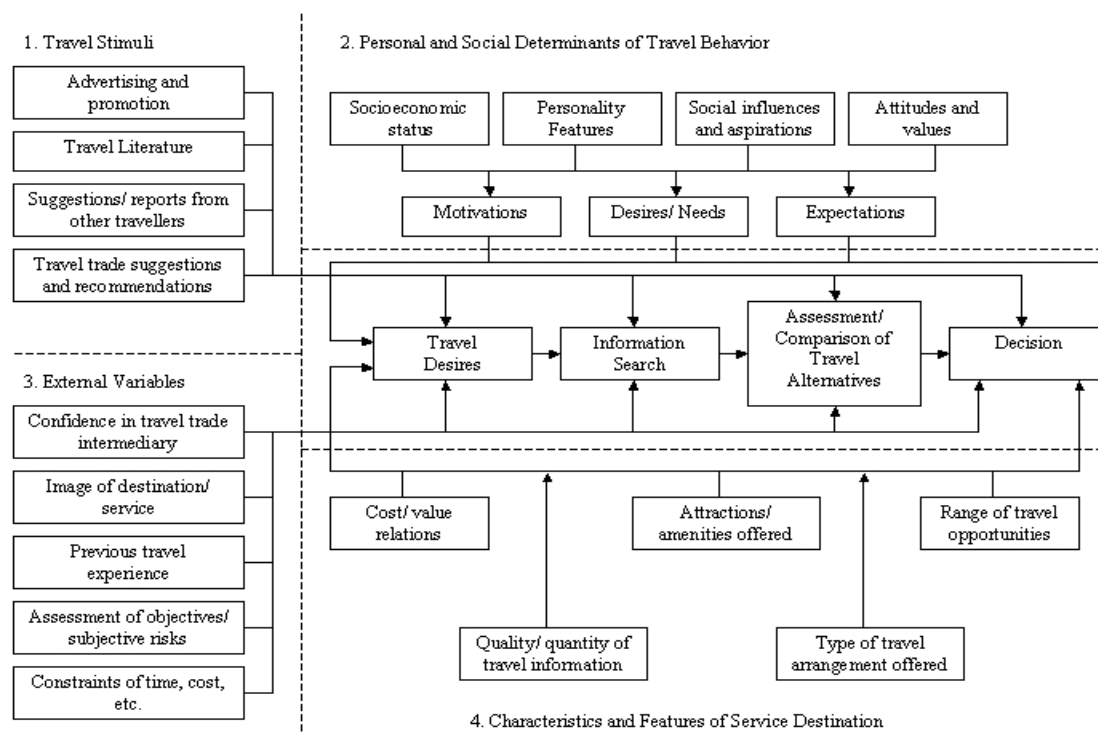
### 3.4.2.2 Schmoll Model

Another descriptive model that highlights the steps in the tourism purchase decision, is that of Schmoll (1977). The model is centred on the following principles:

1. The decision process and its eventual outcome are influenced by four sets of variables: customer goals, travel opportunities, communications effort, and intervening or independent variables.
2. It is possible to identify these sets of variables and their individual components.
3. The eventual decision is in fact the result of a distinct process involving several successive stages or phases.

The model, which is based on the Howard & Sheth (1969) and Nicosia (1966) grand models and is presented in Figure 3.6, consists of four fields, each of which exerts influence over the final decision.

**Figure 3.6**  
**Schmoll Model**



**The Schmoll Model**

- Field 1: Travel stimuli such as promotional communication, personal and trade recommendations.
- Field 2: Travel needs and desires determined by personality, socio-economic factors, attitudes and values.
- Field 3: External variables such as confidence in the service provider, destination image, previous experience, and cost and time constraints.
- Field 4: Destination or service-related characteristics that have a bearing on the decision process and its outcome.

Because it is directly borrowed from the ‘Grand Models’ of consumer behaviour Schmoll’s model offers little new insight into the decision-making process. Also, as Hudson (1999) points out, its descriptive nature renders it limited in terms of its ability to predict or quantify aspects of consumer behaviour. However the model does highlight the characteristics and factors particular to the travel decision-making process, thereby contributing to our understanding of the attributes and interrelationships involved in the tourism choice process. In addition, Schmoll’s is the only model that pays attention to constraints and their impact on decision-making behaviour.

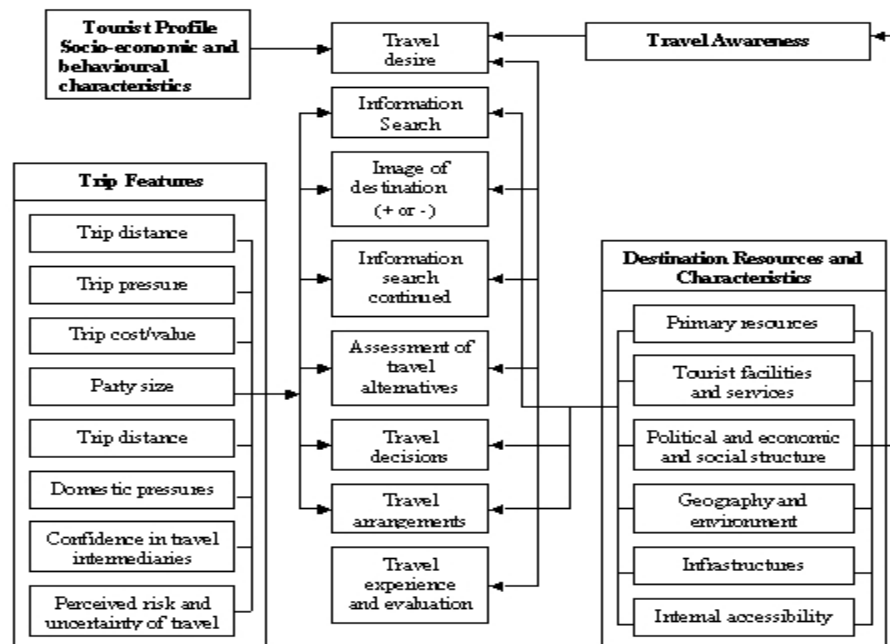
#### ***3.4.2.3 Mathieson & Wall Model***

Another commonly cited model of travel buying behaviour is that by Mathieson & Wall (1982). This is, essentially, a five stage process consisting of - felt need/travel desire, information collection and evaluation, travel decision, travel preparation and travel experience, and finally travel satisfaction evaluation. The full buying behaviour framework that they devised (as presented in Figure 3.7) shows the main stages of the decision process being influenced from four major factors:

1. Tourist profile (including socio-economic and behavioural characteristics such as age, education, income, previous experience and motivations).
2. Travel awareness (image of a destination’s facilities and services rely heavily on the credibility of the source).
3. Trip features (trip duration, distance, duration of stay, party size, and perceived risk of the area visited).

4. Destination resources and characteristics (attractions, amenities, and features of the destination).

**Figure 3.7**  
**Mathieson and Wall (1982)**



Source: Mathieson and wall, 1982, reprinted  
by permission of Addison Wesley Longman

Like the Schmolle model, the Mathieson & Wall framework follows closely the previously reviewed grand models. However as Cooper et al. (1993) highlight, it fails to reflect the depth of insight of these models. It also focuses more on a geographer's product-based perspective rather than that of a consumer behaviourist. In addition Gilbert (1991) has criticised the model for omitting the aspects of perception, memory, personality, and information processing, which form the basis for the traditional models.

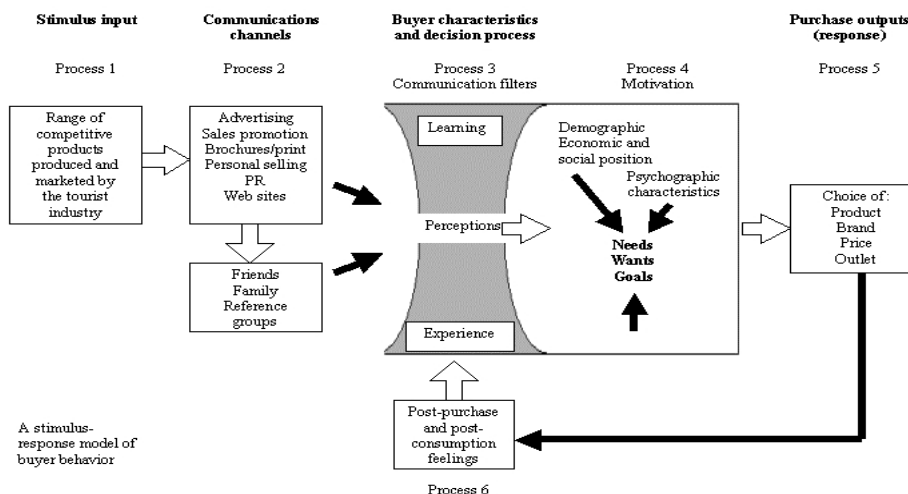
Despite its limitations however, the framework recognises that the impacts of tourism are dynamic, changing with corresponding changes in destination features, trip attributes, and the personal and behavioural characteristics of tourists (Hudson, 1999).

#### 3.4.2.4 Middleton Model

A slightly dissimilar approach to buyer behaviour modelling for tourism was offered by Middleton in 1988. His 'stimulus-response' model differs slightly from the more linear based previous models. It consists of four interactive components (see Figure 3.8). The first two of these highlight the inputs that provide the stimulus for the buying process, most of which can be manipulated by marketing managers. These inputs are processed and interpreted in the central component identified as 'buyer characteristics and decision process.' The final component consists of a purchase output.

The importance of the 'stimulus response' model lies mostly in the emphasis it places on certain aspects of the buying process. For example, Middleton recognised the strong influence family, friends and reference groups have on the decision process.

**Figure 3.8**  
**Middleton (1988)**



Source: Middleton (1988)

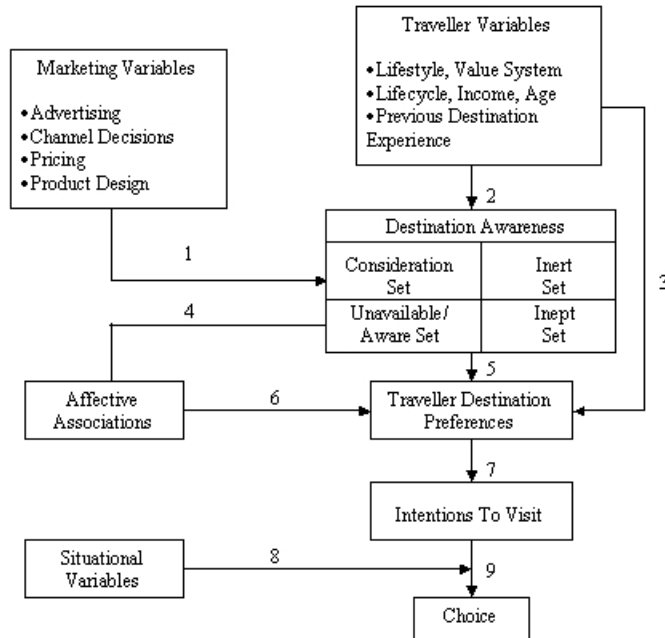
Also, importantly, the model separates out motivation as a key factor in consumer buying behaviour. Middleton sees motivation as the dynamic component in the process, bridging the gap between the felt need and the decision to act or purchase (Hudson, 1999).

#### ***3.4.2.5 Woodside & Lyonski Model***

Many of the models that have been developed by tourism researchers have focused solely on the destination choice. This is not surprising given the importance of the destination in the whole holiday decision process. One of the most well known models of destination choice was developed by Woodside & Lyonski in 1989. The model was based on the work of research findings from many different studies drawn from various disciplines including psychology, marketing and travel and tourism. The authors presented the travel decision as a categorisation process of destinations from which preferences, intentions, and final choice emerge (see Figure 3.9). The model posits that before forming preferences, a traveller places all destinations familiar to him/her into the first of a series of four mental sets. Marketing and personal variables influence this process. Then, out of these mental sets, final preferences emerge through the possible influence of affective associations (defined as positive or negative feelings associated with a destination). The final choice is a function of a person's intention to visit a destination where situational variables act as moderators between intentions and the choice.



**Figure 3.9**  
**Woodside and Lysonski (1989)**



General Model of Traveller Leisure Destination Awareness and Choice  
Based on: Woodside and Lysonski, 1989

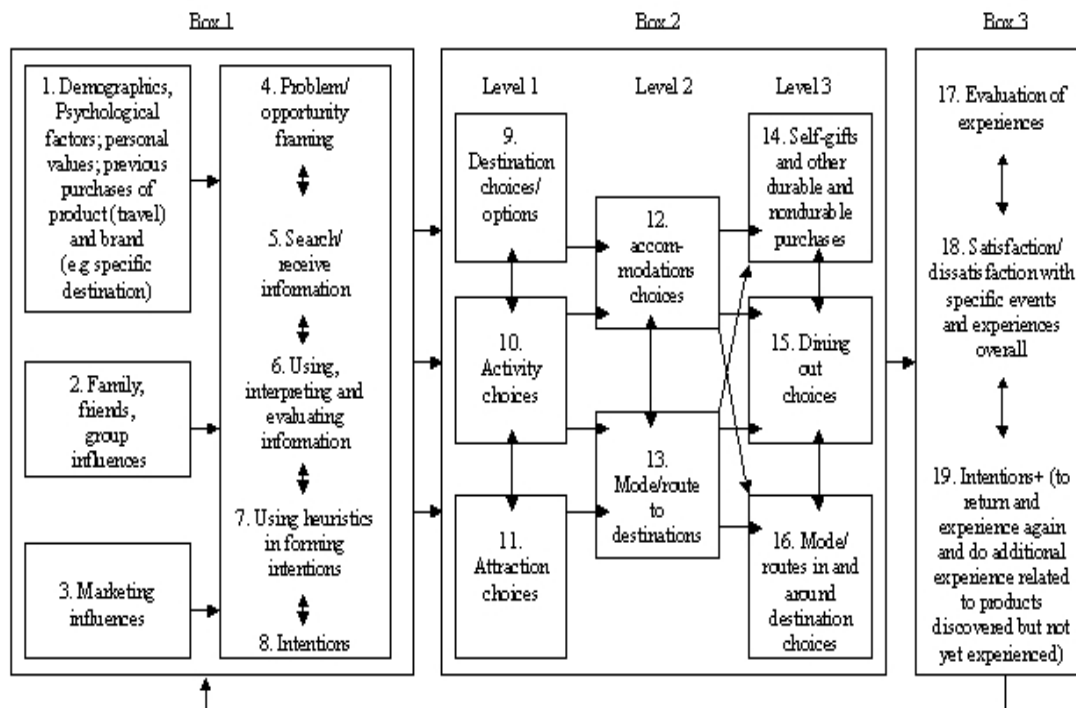
The authors tested their model using students as respondents. They concluded that tracking people's awareness of, and preference for, competing destinations should be recognised as an important endeavour for measuring market performance and planning marketing actions. However, because of the size and specific nature of the sample used in the research, limitations exist in relation to the generalisability of the findings (Hudson, 1999).

### 3.4.2.6 Woodside & King Model

In a more recent examination of the travel decision process Woodside & King (2001) present their general purchase consumption system (PCS) framework (Figure 3.10). This is a useful model because it addresses the multi-decision making nature of trip taking. Many of the tourism models up to this had viewed the travel decision as a singular process, resulting in either the choice of a destination or the purchase of a package type product. However, in the Woodside & King model, a more multidimensional view of travel planning and behaviour is offered with

numerous travel choices being highlighted both before and during the trip. These include choices relating to destination, accommodation, transport (both to and in the destination), activities, attractions, dining out and shopping. The authors point out that travellers' decision-making behaviours are based on many variables in relationships that are interactive rather than linear. This is an important point particularly in relation to modern trip taking behaviour where travel planning may involve separate purchasing of individual components of the trip (e.g. flight and hotel).

**Figure 3.10**  
**Woodside and King (2001)**



**Framework of Purchase-Consumption System Applied to Leisure Travel Behaviour**

Another more recent contribution to the travel decision-making literature is that of Ryan (2002, p.64) who puts forward a simple model which highlights the variables and factors that lead to an intention to take a holiday. These include:

1. Marketing variables – for example, product design, pricing, advertising / promotion channels;
2. Tourist variables – for example, previous destination experience, life-cycle, income, age, lifestyle, value system and motivations;
3. Destination awareness – unavailable or considered sets, and whether these sets are inert, inept or evoked;
4. Affective associations of destinations – positive or negative;
5. Tourist destination preferences;
6. Specific situational variables – for example children's school holidays, partner's holiday entitlement, perceived need for a holiday due to 'overwork'.

Point six in this model is important as it specifically refers to situational variables. These are often overlooked or not referred to in some models but yet can be extremely influential in travel decision making.

### **3.4.3 Contribution of Tourism Decision Making Models**

Cooper et al. (1998) suggest that models of consumer behaviour remain at a relatively early stage of their development and significant levels of research are still required to improve our understanding of what are, effectively, subjective psychological influences upon buying processes in tourism. The examples outlined above are just a sample of the principal models commonly referred to on the topic of consumer behaviour in tourism. While highlighting the contribution that such models have made to tourism consumer behaviour research, Swarbrooke & Horner (2007, p.77) argue that most of the models have some common weaknesses. A summary of these is as follows:

- In general most models are based on little or no empirical research. Therefore they show little evidence that they represent the reality of how tourism decisions are actually made.
- Most of the commonly cited models are quite old, with many originally being presented in the 1970s and 80s. Because of this, most predate significant recent developments in tourist behaviour, including;
  - the increasing popularity of last-minute spontaneous purchases of tourism

- products,
- the growing use of the internet and multi-media systems that can be accessed from the tourist's own home
  - the growth of direct marketing
  - the rise of the all-inclusive resort holiday
- Most of the work has a geographical bias with few of the tourism models reflecting the nature of consumer behaviour in the major emerging markets of South East Asia and Eastern Europe.
- The main models also tend to represent tourists as a homogenous group. However in reality this is never the case. Tourists can be segmented into many different categories and types based on a variety of factors.
- Many models fail to recognise the impact or dominance of motivators and determinants on the purchase decisions.
- There is also the assumption throughout the models that people exhibit rationalistic behaviour in their decision-making. Such behaviour is limited in tourism due to the imperfect information that is generally available to tourists and the fact that many consumers will be influenced by their own attitudes and prejudices which may be irrational.
- The main tourism models rarely take into account the nature of the holiday being purchased. This is very questionable given the fact that there are many types of trips from complex family holidays to short break trips. Therefore the nature of the purchase decision and the effort put into making it varies significantly.

(Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007, p.77)

These points represent valid criticisms of the established decision making models. In particular, the issue in relation to them failing to reflect the changing booking behaviour of travellers is well founded. In addition, the last point is especially relevant to this research – stressing as it does the importance of taking into account the nature of the holiday being purchased. This is a criticism also made by Hudson (1999, p.24) when he says that the main tourism models “seem to ignore *type of holiday* in their trip features.” He goes on to point out that “with the increase in special interest and activity holidays, future models should take into account the plethora of holiday

options available to the consumer.” Similarly, in their review of theories of decision making by travellers, Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) conclude that there is no single unifying theory across disciplines to describe, explain, or predict consumer decisions, and it seems unlikely that individual decision processes fit neatly into a single decision theory. This suggests the futility of trying to find a ‘one model fits all’ in relation to tourism decision making and the importance of devoting more attention to examining and comparing the different decision making scenarios that exist in travel purchasing today.

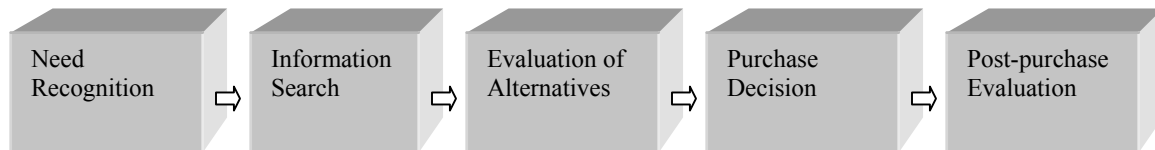
Certainly the city break decision does not seem to fit many of the established tourism models as outlined above - or at least not the ones that presuppose high involvement on the part of the decision maker and assume rationalistic behaviour from them. This research therefore intends to examine the specific characteristics involved in the decision to take a city break holiday. It is increasingly being realised that highlighting the differences between various types of tourist groups such as city breakers will ultimately be more beneficial to destination and product managers than trying to develop more general, all encompassing models – as well as offering opportunities for researchers to garner more valuable insights into travel consumer behaviour.

### **3.5. Components of the Decision Making Process**

In order to get a better understanding of travel and tourism purchase behaviour it is necessary to analyse in-depth the various components of the decision making process. This involves examining in greater detail the individual steps most people follow when making a purchase decision - as well as the system of internal and external forces that interact and affect how the consumer thinks, evaluates and acts. From the models of consumer behaviour already reviewed it is evident that a number of common decision stages exist which are well accepted. At its most basic, for non-routinised purchases (like the purchase of most tourism services), consumer decision making can be summed up as a five stage process: *(1) problem recognition, (2) information search, (3) evaluation, (4) purchase, and (5) post-purchase evaluation*, (Engel et al., 1986). Although authors may present the stages using slightly different names, this model is

generally well established in the consumer behaviour literature. It therefore provides a useful structure for analysing the travel decision process.

**Figure 3.11**  
**Consumer Decision Making Process**



1. *Need Recognition* – a perception of difference between the desired state of affairs and the actual situation, sufficient to arouse and activate the decision process.
2. *Information Search* – search for information stored in memory (internal search) or search of decision-relevant information from the environment (external search).
3. *Pre-purchase alternative evaluation* – evaluation of options in terms of expected benefits and narrowing the choice to the preferred alternative.
4. *Purchase* – acquisition of the preferred alternative or an acceptable substitute.
5. *Post-purchase alternative evaluation* – evaluation of the degree to which the consumption experience produced satisfaction.

Each of these stages will now be taken individually and examined in more detail to try and understand the critical issues pertaining to each, particularly in the context of a tourism purchase.

### 3.6 Need Recognition and Motivation Stage

The buying process starts when the buyer recognizes a problem or need. The buyer senses a difference between his or her actual state and a desired state, Kotler et al. (2003, p.219). For the potential tourist, recognising the need of a holiday could be as a result of boredom with everyday life, needing a break, the desire to travel to a specific destination, or being motivated to visit friends and family. Recognising the need or problem initiates the decision process through search for information about alternatives. Hodgson (1983) views the holiday decision as a set of hierarchical questions, which he describes as first, second, third and fourth order questions. The answers to first-order questions, such as whether to take a holiday, and to second-order questions, such as, what type of holiday to take, are largely predetermined by basic motivations. Once these questions have been answered the holiday maker turns to third order questions, such as where to go, what type of accommodation to use, and with which tour operator to book. The fourth order questions subsequently deal with factors such as, timing of booking and purchase of necessary foreign currency. Goodall (1991) points out that once first and second-order decisions to take a trip and seek a particular type of holiday have been made, the goals of the holiday-maker have to be clearly specified. Goals range from general, e.g. attractive scenery, to very specific, e.g. package holiday with daytime flights.

Most travel and tourism suppliers are well aware of the importance of recognizing what needs and problems consumers face in relation to trip taking. Crotts (1999, p.151) points out that marketing managers often try to cause consumers to recognize their travel needs. He cites the following example:

*Florida television and radio advertisements triggered to air by snowstorms in Canada and snowbelt states are designed to create discrepancies between a consumer's desired state and actual state, in an effort to arouse and activate the travel decision-making process.*

It is impossible to analyse the need recognition stage without addressing the issue of travel motives. Thus, the subject of motivation is examined next.

### **3.6.1 Motivation and the Drive to Action**

According to Shiffman & Kanuk (2000) motivation can be described as the driving force within individuals that impels them to action. This driving force emerges from a state of tension that exists as the result of an unfulfilled need. As mentioned, a need is the difference between a person's actual and desired state. Needs are viewed as the force that arouses motivated behaviour. Therefore, to understand human motivation, it is necessary to find out people's needs and how they can be satisfied. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is probably the most widely known theory of motivation, perhaps because of its simplicity. The theory is based on the notion of a universal 'hierarchy of needs.' Maslow's theory identifies five basic levels of human needs, which rank in order of importance from lower level (biogenic) needs to higher-level (psychogenic) needs. He argued that individuals seek to satisfy lower level needs first before moving on to higher level ones. Although Maslow's theory was initially developed in the context of clinical psychology, it has become widely used in a variety of fields including marketing, organisational psychology and human resource management. Indeed, the convenience and simplicity of the theory has prompted a number of tourism authors to apply the hierarchical concept to travel motives (e.g. Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). Within Maslow's model, human activity is connected to predetermined, and predictable aspects of action. This is very much in the behaviourist tradition of psychology as opposed to the cognitive approach which highlights the irrationality and unpredictability of behaviour. Maslow's theory has been criticized in many quarters – this has ranged from questionable support to total rejection. Witt & Wright (1992) criticise the theory for omitting a number of important needs. Others feel it is difficult to justify the model when he did not carry out clinical observation or experiment. Nonetheless, as a simple way to conceptualise the linkage between needs and behaviour, the theory still has value today.

In terms of travel motivation, a wide range of opinions and theories have been proposed and presented over the past forty years. As Schott (2002, p.131) points out, "the topic of holiday motivation and the related issue of tourist typologies is possibly the most controversial and debated field in tourism." Some of the principal concepts and theories on this subject will be reviewed next.



### **3.6.2 Motivation and Tourism**

Tourist motivation is seen by many authors as one of the key elements in our understanding of tourist decision making behaviour. The answer to the basic question “why do people travel?” has occupied the minds of tourist researchers for many years. Lundberg (1972, p.107) suggests that finding answers poses a number of difficulties including the possibility that “what the traveller says are his motivations for travelling may only be reflections of deeper needs, needs which he himself does not understand nor wish to articulate.”

However, these difficulties have not deterred many people from attempting to explain what goes on in people’s minds in terms of travel motivations. Most tourism consumer behaviour researchers agree that needs and motivations are interrelated (Goodall, 1988; Witt & Wright, 1992). The existence of the former generates the latter. Based on Maslow’s theory, Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) analysed nearly 400 travel experiences using a five stage classification, and argued for a different needs system that may fit tourists more appropriately. They put forward the notion of a motivational career in travel, with more experienced tourists showing higher needs than less experienced travellers.

McIntosh, Goeldner & Ritchie (1995) suggested that travel motivations could be divided into four categories:

<i>Physical Motivators:</i>	those associated with refreshment of body and mind, health purposes, sport and pleasure. Such motivators are seen to be linked to those activities which will reduce tension.
<i>Cultural Motivators:</i>	these include the desire for knowledge of other countries and places – their music, art, folklore, dances, paintings and religion.
<i>Interpersonal Motivators:</i>	these involve a desire to meet new people, to visit friends or relatives, to escape from routine, family or neighbours, or to make new friendships.
<i>Status and Prestige Motivators:</i>	this group includes a desire for recognition, attention, appreciation and a good reputation.

Although this classification is useful in terms of providing a basic understanding of the different types of motivations present in trip taking, it is nonetheless very general and is susceptible to close scrutiny. As Cooper et al. (1998, p.35) point out “no scientific basis is claimed for the categories nor is any indication given of the proportion of tourists who would exhibit one type of motivation rather than another.” Dann (1981, p.190), following an examination of the literature, reveals that the study of tourist motivation consists of an amalgam of ideas and approaches which he conveniently summarises into the following seven categories:

1. Travel as a response to what is lacking yet desired (typically the need for getting away from it all).
2. Destination “Pull” in response to motivational “Push”. This distinguishes between the motivation of the individual tourist in terms of the level of desire (push) and the attractiveness (pull) of the destination.
3. Motivation as fantasy (common to this approach is the idea that tourism can liberate tourists from the shackles of their everyday existence).
4. Motivation as a classified purpose (a common approach is to view motivation according to the purpose of visit, e.g. health, study, sightseeing).
5. Motivational typologies (this approach is concerned with tourist roles or types).
6. Motivation and tourist experiences (this approach focuses on the actual experiences tourists go through).
7. Motivation as auto-definition and meaning (how tourists define situations provides a greater understanding of their action than a mere examination of their behaviour).

Although there is considerable overlap between the above seven approaches to tourist motivation, it nonetheless highlights the diversity of thinking on the topic and suggests a lack of agreement on the parameters of the concept. Indeed, Dann suggests that a “definitional fuzziness” exists which, if not clarified, may make it difficult to discover “whether or not individual tourism researchers are studying the same phenomenon.”

### ***3.6.2.1 Push and Pull Factors of Motivation***

The approach that is probably most commonly agreed upon and used in relation to travel motivations is the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ concept (Crompton, 1979; Chon, 1989; Pyo, Mihalik & Uysal, 1989; Cha, McCleary & Uysal, 1995; Jang & Cai, 2002). Push factors have generally been thought useful for explaining the desire for travel while the pull motivations have been used to explain the actual destination choice. Many consider the push factors to be socio-psychological motivations that predispose the individual to travel. These include factors such as, the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, health and fitness, adventure, prestige and kinship. On the other hand the pull factors are those that attract the individual to a particular destination. These include tangible resources such as beaches, recreation facilities and historic sites as well as visitors’ perception and expectation (particularly in terms of marketed image). It is generally regarded that push and pull factors relate to two separate decisions made at two separate points in time – one focusing on whether to go, the other on where to go. Therefore, push factors are perceived to be present before pull factors can be effective (Mill & Morrison, 1998). Dann (1977), along with subsequent researchers, emphasises the importance of push factors, pointing out that the actual decision to visit a destination is consequent to the prior need for travel. Therefore the question, ‘What makes people travel?’ is strongly associated with the underlying primary needs of an individual and not the destination attributes (i.e. pull factors).

Crompton (1979) empirically identified nine motivations of pleasure vacation travellers. He classified seven as socio-psychological or push motives and two as cultural or pull motives. The seven push motives were escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, and facilitation of social interaction. The pull motives were novelty and education. These and other researchers’ findings in relation to push and pull categories are presented in Table 3.1.

These studies differ in the approach used to identify the individual push and pull factors – some were based on qualitative methods such as personal interviews (Crompton, 1979; Klenosky, 2002), others on more conceptually based scale development approaches (Dann, 1977; Fodness, 1994), and others on multivariate analyses of existing survey data (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994;

Turnbull & Uysal, 1995; Oh, Uysal, & Weaver, 1995; Cha et al., 1995; Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Sirakaya & McLellan, 1997; Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Jang & Cai, 2002).

These studies also differed in terms of the focus of the research. Some examined both push and pull motives while others limited their investigation to either one or the other (i.e. push or pull).

**Table 3.1**  
**Previous Empirical Studies Examining Push and Pull Factors**

<b>Researcher(s)</b>	<b>Research Approach Used</b>	<b>Push Factors Identified</b>	<b>Pull Factors Identified</b>
Dann (1977)	Scale/survey development and analysis	Anomie, ego enhancement	
Crompton (1979)	Unstructured in-depth interviews	Escape, self-exploration and evaluation, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, social interaction	Novelty, education
Yuan and McDonald (1990)	Factor analysis of 29 motivational/push items and 53 destination/pull items	Escape, novelty, prestige, enhancement of kinship relationships, relaxation/hobbies	Budget, culture and history, wilderness, ease of travel, cosmopolitan environment, facilities, hunting
Fodness (1994)	Scale development	Ego-defence, knowledge, reward maximization, punishment avoidance, value expression, social adjustive	
Uysal and Jurowski (1994)	Factor analyses of 26 motivational/push items and 29 destination/pull items	Re-experiencing family togetherness, sports, cultural experience, escape	Entertainment/resort, outdoors/nature, heritage/culture, rural/inexpensive
Turnbull and Uysal (1995)	Factor analysis of 30 motivational/push items and 53 destination/pull items	Cultural experiences, escape, re-experiencing family, sports, prestige	Heritage/culture, city enclave, comfort/relaxation, beach resort, outdoor resources, rural and inexpensive
Oh, Uysal, and Weaver (1995)	Canonical correlation analysis of 30 motivational/push items and 52 destination/pull items	Knowledge/intellectual kinship/social interaction, novelty/adventure, entertainment/prestige, sports, escape/rest	Historical/cultural, sports/activity, safety/upscale, nature/outdoor, inexpensive/budget
Cha, McCleary, and Uysal (1995)	Factor analysis of 30 motivational/push items	Relaxation, knowledge, adventure, travel bragging, family, sports	
Baloglu and Uysal (1996)	Canonical correlation analysis of 30 motivational/push items and 53 destination/pull items	Four canonical variate pairs of push and pull items were identified. These were used to identify four market segments labelled: sports/activity seekers, novelty seekers, urban-life seekers, beach/resort seekers	
Sirakaya and McLellan (1997)	Factor analysis of 56 destination/pull items		Local hospitality and services, cost and convenience, safe/secure environment, change to daily life, recreation and sport, entertainment and drinking, personal and historical link, cultural and shopping services, unusual and distant vacation spot
Klenosky (2002)	Interviews using means-end laddering procedure		Skiing, historical /cultural attractions, new/unique location, scenic/natural resources, beaches, party atmosphere
Jang and Cai (2002)	Factor analysis of 22 push items and 19 pull items	Novel experience, escape, knowledge seeking, fun and excitement, rest and relaxation, family/friend togetherness	Natural and historic environment, cleanliness and safety, easy to access/economical deal, outdoor activities, sunny and exotic atmosphere

*Source:* Adapted from Klenosky 2002

### **3.6.2.2 Means-End Approach to Motivation**

Klenosky (2002) adopted an interesting approach to examine travel pull motivators. His study used a means-end approach that examined the relationships between the pull attributes of a destination (i.e. “the means”) and the higher level motivational forces important to the individual traveller (“the ends”). The author found that by using a laddering process of questioning based on initial destination attributes or pull factors it was possible to elicit more abstract reasons for travel from respondents. As Klenosky explains;

*a laddering interview might link the attribute of a particular destination such as “has nice beaches,” to the benefit “I can work on my tan,” to the higher level benefit “I look better/healthier,” and then to the value “I feel better about myself” (self esteem). This simple chain shows how a potential pull factor of a destination relates to the consequences and personal values important to an individual traveller.*

Interestingly, although Klenosky’s study did not investigate push factors per se – that is, it did not explicitly examine the forces that led to the initial decision to take a vacation – several of the consequence and value concepts revealed (e.g. accomplishment, fun and enjoyment, excitement, and self esteem) are notably similar to the push factors that have been reported in the tourism literature. This highlights the close links between pull and push factors and is consistent with the view put forward by Crompton (1979) that although push factors may influence the initial decision or drive to travel, these same factors may also help to direct tourists in deciding which particular destination should be selected.

### **3.6.2.3 Approach – Avoidance Concept**

Another notable contribution to tourist motivation research was made by Iso-Ahola (1980, 1982) who focused on the social-psychological aspects of trip taking, including the approach-avoidance dimension of the travel decision. Here the author puts forward two motivational forces that simultaneously influence tourist behaviour: *approach* (seeking recreational opportunities for certain intrinsic rewards) and *avoidance* (escaping of routine and stressful environments). Iso-Ahola concludes that tourism represents more of an escape-oriented than an approach-oriented activity for most people under most conditions. Interestingly, the author points to the trend towards more frequent, but shorter, holiday taking as being indicative of how the escape dimension is a more important motivational force than the seeking dimension. Pearce (1982)

supports this approach-avoidance paradigm, particularly in the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Together with Mannell, Iso-Ahola later (1987) identified two main types of push and pull factors: *personal* and *interpersonal*. They suggest that people are motivated to travel in order both to leave behind the personal and/or interpersonal problems of everyday life and to obtain personal and/or interpersonal rewards from participation in travel activities. This is similar to Dann's (1977) suggestion that two main factors govern people's travel motives: Anomie and Ego-enhancement. According to Dann we live in an anomic society and this generates a need in people for social interaction which is missing in the home place - therefore there is a need to travel away from the home environment. Ego-enhancement, on the other hand, derives from the need for recognition, which is obtained through the status conferred by travel. "Analogous to the desire for a bodily tune up is the need to have one's ego enhanced or boosted," (Dann 1977, p.187).

Both of these motives were viewed by the author as push factors and both are among the seven 'Push' factors identified by Crompton (1979). Indeed, an examination of the many studies on tourist motivation reveals a core of similar motives appearing again and again. Even though some may be termed or labelled differently they are in many cases the same thing. Following a review of the tourism literature Krippendorf (1987) outlines eight categories of travel motivation. These are as follows:

- Recuperation and regeneration
- Compensation and social integration
- Escape
- Communication
- Freedom and self determination
- Self realization
- Happiness and
- Broadening the mind

One of the main difficulties with many of the principal classification models of tourism motivation is the fact that they are so general. The truth is, no widely recognized format exists for categorising the main motivating factors for travel. There is no overriding answer to the question of why people go on holidays. Every tourist is different and so are the trips that they take.

#### ***3.6.2.4 Motivation and Type of Tourist***

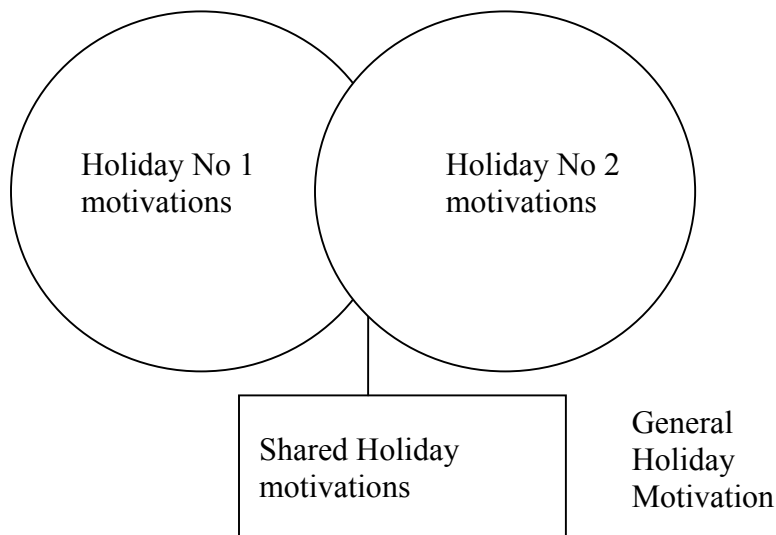
One useful approach may be to examine how motivations can differ according to the type of tourist in question. Some researchers have examined motivations based on different market segments. In 1996, Kaynok et al. published a study of Irish travellers' perceptions of motivational factors that led to their travel preferences of major foreign holiday destinations. This study found significant variations between tourists of different ages, sexes, educational attainment, income and marital status. Similarly, Jamrozy & Uysal (1994) found that people's motivations varied according to the travel unit they were part of. For example, the results illustrated that people travelling alone and in friendship groups showed different push motivations compared to families, couples and tour groups. However, this study along with most of the others relating to tourist motivation, fails to take into account the nature of the trip involved.

#### ***3.6.2.5 Motivation and Type of Trip***

The type of trip a person takes in terms of its core format i.e. short break, main holiday, cycling holiday, city break etc., is rarely highlighted in the tourism motivation literature and yet it seems such a crucial factor in the context of the whole motivational process. Bloy (2000, p.28) highlights this fact when he comments on "the paucity of current tourist motivational research in being able to accommodate a dynamic model of intra-personal motivation."

**Figure 3.12**

**Hypothesised Intra-personal Motivational Profile for Multiple Holiday-Taking Behaviour**



*Source:* Bloy (2000)

He points out that most studies tend to make the assumption that a person has one set of motivations and seeks one type of holiday to satisfy them. He therefore highlights the need for “applied research to be undertaken within the tourism field in order to test the hypothesis that an individual’s motives can vary over a number of holidays,” and goes on to present a model that illustrates the multi-motivational aspect of modern trip taking (Figure 3.12). For the sake of graphic simplicity Bloy represented multiple holiday-taking by only two holidays. However any number of holidays can be added. In his own study Bloy looked at people’s motives for choosing a cycling holiday and compared that to their motives for going on other types of holidays. Conducting qualitative interviews with cyclists he discovered that significant differences existed in people’s motivations depending on the type of holiday taken. For example, the concept of challenge or achievement was the most common motive given to undertake a cycling holiday but was rarely cited as a motivating force in undertaking non-cycling holidays.



**Table 3.2**

**Strength of Motivational Dimensions: Comparison of Cycling and Non-Cycling Holidays**

<i><b>Motivational Dimension</b></i>	<i><b>Cycling Holidays</b></i>	<i><b>Non-Cycling Holidays</b></i>
<i><b>Achievement</b></i>	High	Low
<i><b>Physical</b></i>	Moderate	Low
<i><b>Kinship</b></i>	High	Moderate
<i><b>Stimulus Avoidance</b></i>	Moderate	High
<i><b>Nature</b></i>	High	Low
<i><b>Psychological</b></i>	High	Low
<i><b>Environmental</b></i>	Low	Low
<i><b>Hedonism</b></i>	High	High
<i><b>Rational Being</b></i>	Low	Low
<i><b>Solitude</b></i>	High	High
<i><b>Prestige</b></i>	High	Moderate

*Source:* Bloy (2000)

Table 3.2 highlights the differences between cycling and non cycling holiday motives. Although Bloy's study is quite exploratory in nature and based on a small number of qualitative interviews, it does concur with other work in the recreation field that similarly identifies a level of motivational heterogeneity across activities (Tinsley & Barrett, 1977; Tinsley & Kass, 1978, 1979; Baldwin & Tinsley, 1988). This notion of different motives for different types of holidays is an important point and one that has significant relevance to this research. The factors that motivate people to take a city break have rarely been examined, particularly in the context of trying to determine if such motives are different or distinctive from those for other types of holidays.

### **3.6.3 Motivation and the City Break Market**

Differentiating motivations on the basis of type of visit has received relatively little attention from tourism researchers. In particular, research that compares motives for different types of trips e.g. main holiday travel versus city break. This is surprising given the range and diversity that exists in trip taking today and the futility of applying a generic motive categorization scheme to all types of trips. One useful contribution by Teare (1994) examined peoples' motives for

purchasing hotel leisure breaks in the UK. From his research he derived a six-part classification of primary motives. These were as follows:

1. To coincide with attending a pre-arranged event.
2. In response to the need for a break from family/domestic commitments routine problems/employment-related pressures.
3. In response to a desire to relax/recover in different/comfortable surroundings.
4. In response to a desire to visit a particular town/region/hotel/somewhere new.
5. To compensate for a missed summer (main) holiday opportunity.
6. For the specific benefits derived from taking short breaks on a regular/seasonal basis.

Another study by Baloglu & Uysal (1996) examining push and pull travel motives in the German market, identified four market segments with distinctive motivational attributes. These were sports /activity seekers, novelty seekers, urban-life seekers, and beach/resort seekers. According to their findings the urban-life seekers specifically desire comfort and variety of attractions in an urban setting. The authors suggest that destinations wanting to target this segment should emphasize safety and comfort, and destination attributes such as cleanliness, high quality restaurants, warm hospitality, and a variety of urban activities.

In relation to urban tourism motives specifically, Page (2002, p.135) criticises the failure of many cities, which promote tourism, to understand the reasons why people visit them. He suggests that:

*the links between the various motivations and the deeper reasons why people are attracted to cities remains a fertile area for theoretically informed and methodologically sound research.*

In summary, motivation in tourism is clearly a crucial research area that holds the key to much of our understanding of why people travel. Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on the topic, most of this still consists of what Fodness (1994) calls ‘developing a list

of the reasons for travel' - and while the literature shows there are similarities among these lists, most offer little in terms of operationalisation and empirical support.

In relation to this particular research, two areas stand out as being especially neglected in the travel motivation literature. First is the lack of attention given to exploring the initial motivation in deciding whether or not to take a holiday - what Hodgson refers to as first order questions. Little investigation has been conducted into how this initial generic decision comes about. For example in some cases, such as the main summer family holiday, people may follow a pattern of holiday taking where the decision to take a trip is predetermined, i.e. they take a summer holiday every year. In such a situation the motivation issue relates more to *where* to go or *what type* of trip to take. Other trips however, are taken on a far more ad hoc and discretionary basis. In these situations the decision of whether or not to take a holiday has a lot more salience. Very few tourism researchers specifically address this important factor.

The second deficiency in the literature relates to the lack of research dealing with motivational heterogeneity across leisure trips. That is, the notion that people can use different motives for different trips. Researchers commonly fail to qualify the travel motives they uncover by pointing out the type of trip they relate to.

As well as highlighting these deficiencies, this examination of the literature also demonstrates the complexity of travel motivation as a subject and the diversity of opinion and approaches that exist in relation to its study. As Krippendorf (1987, p.67) points out:

*motives, and the phenomenon of travel in general, can be interpreted in many ways, little of which, however, can be conclusively proved. The literature on tourism is full of different explanations and interpretations. The truth will not probably lie in one or the other of these theories, but in a mixture of different interpretations.*

### 3.7. The Search for Information

The second stage of the decision making process is the search for information. Moutinho (1987) describes this as an expressed need to consult various sources prior to making a purchase decision. In terms of the determinants of the information search, Snepenger et al (1990) identified four categories of variables that have been found to affect search: 1) travelling party composition, 2) the presence of friends and relatives at the destination, 3) past experience, and 4) the degree of novelty associated with the destination. The information search usually begins with the consumer examining his or her own memory, what Shiffman & Kanuk (2000) call the *psychological field*. This internal information search consists of the retrieval of decision-relevant information stored in an individual's long-term memory. The internal information may have been actively acquired at one time from past information searches or passively acquired through repeatedly being exposed to information sources such as marketing stimuli. In the case of the travel decision one of the most important internal sources is the person's previous travel experience, either with a specific destination or service provider or with similar ones.

When internal search proves inadequate to make a purchase decision, the consumer then concentrates on acquiring information through external sources. This involves focusing attention on the external environment. In the case of leisure travel, the information search is often predominantly external, involving considerable effort and a variety of information sources (Schul & Crompton, 1983). These external sources for potential travellers can be varied but according to Crotts (1999) can be summarized into four main categories. These are:

- (1) personal sources (e.g. family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances),
- (2) marketer-dominated (e.g. advertising, salespeople, dealers, brochures, packaging displays),
- (3) neutral (travel clubs, travel guides, travel agents), and
- (4) experiential sources, including inspections, pre-purchase visits, or store contacts.

Crotts also makes the point that many consider the internet as a fifth uniquely interactive source of external information, while others would consider it to be covered under marketer-dominated or neutral sources depending on the purpose or content of the information. Either way it is an increasingly important information source for potential travellers. Marketer-dominated sources of information are often found to have the least direct influence on consumer decision making. Instead, advice from friends and relatives generally comes out strongest as the most frequently accessed and influential source of information for travellers. This can also be seen in Engel et al.'s (1995, p.189) useful classification system which distinguishes between sources of information that are commercial or non commercial and those that are received from personal or impersonal sources.

**Figure 3.13**  
**Classification of Tourism Information Sources**

<u>Type of Information</u>			
<u>Source of Information</u>		<i>Impersonal</i>	<i>Personal</i>
<i>Commercial</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Destination Marketing Orgs. Promotional Material</li> <li>• Internet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel Agents</li> <li>• Tour Operators</li> <li>• Sales reps</li> <li>• Tour Guides</li> <li>• Tourist Information Staff</li> <li>• Tourism Supplier Staff</li> </ul>
<i>Noncommercial</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magazine Features</li> <li>• Newspaper Travel Sections</li> <li>• TV Travel Programmes</li> <li>• Other TV Programmes</li> <li>• Guide Books</li> <li>• Other Books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends or relatives</li> <li>• Peer Group</li> <li>• Work Colleagues</li> <li>• Hearsay</li> </ul>

Adapting it for the travel purchase (outlined in Figure 3.13), we can see that the bottom right quadrant (personal and non-commercial sources) is generally regarded as the most influential.

Another categorization is offered by Gunn (1972), who describes the information sources that travellers use as either *organic*, in the case of non-tourism industry sources e.g. family and friends, or *induced*, for tourism sources. According to Fodness & Murray (1997) previous research into tourist information search has focused particularly on two areas, namely, the *degree* of the search (i.e. the number of sources used and amount of time devoted to search activity) and the *direction* of the search (specific sources used). From their own research the authors have found that “degree, rather than direction of search, is a more appropriate and successful operationalization” (Fodness & Murray 1997, p.520). The degree of the search is often determined by the level of problem solving engaged in by the consumer.

### **3.7.1 Information Search and Level of Problem Solving**

According to Shiffman & Kanuk (2000) problem solving can be categorised on three levels; (1) Extensive, (2) Limited, and (3) Routine.

**(1) Extensive problem solving** applies to purchases associated with high levels of perceived risk and involvement (often an expensive product or an infrequently purchased, lower priced item). Buyers tend to use an extensive information search strategy in these situations. Fodness & Murray (1997) found that such behaviour was highly associated with tourists who stayed longer, used paid accommodation, made more overnight stops, and visited more attractions. In addition, they found that families which included very young children were more likely to engage in extensive information searching.

**(2) Limited problem solving** covers the middle ground on the purchase involvement continuum. This type of behaviour is typical when the consumer purchases a product occasionally and/or acquires information about unfamiliar brands in a familiar product category. Their search for information is more like “fine-tuning”. This results in a limited information search which may or may not involve external information sources.

**(3) Routinised response behaviour** involves very little search and decision effort. It is generally used for products that are low priced and bought frequently and quickly. This usually results in an information search that is carried out rapidly and with the use of minimum sources. Typically

tourists visiting family and friends and staying in unpaid accommodation use this search behaviour. In addition, people at the single stage of the life-cycle are more likely to use such streamlined trip planning as they do not have to involve other people in the process (Fodness & Murray, 1997). In relation to choosing a destination for a holiday, Hawkins, Best & Coney (1995) cited in Crotts (1999) also identified people who follow this routinised or habitual behaviour pattern. They break down such decision making behaviour into two types, destination loyal decisions and repeat purchase decisions. Destination loyal decisions are typical where people have previously used extensive problem solving in relation to choosing a destination and have been satisfied with their decision. They will subsequently repurchase the same destination without further consideration of other options. In contrast repeat purchase decisions are typical where a person believes that all destinations in a certain area or of a certain type are about the same. Having experienced one of these destinations and finding it satisfactory, the traveller will repurchase the same experience using habitual decision making. Although both of these decisions are similar in that they use routine response behaviour, differences do exist in terms of their loyalty to the destination. Repeat purchasers can be convinced to choose alternative places because they possess little commitment to the destination. In contrast, destination-loyal visitors are highly committed to their preferred destination and will not change easily.

In addition to these three levels of consumer decision-making, there is the special case of *impulse buying behaviour*. This is described as an unplanned, spur-of-the-moment action/purchase, often triggered by product display or point-of-sale promotion (Piron, 1991). The impulse purchase is something which has received very little attention in tourism literature. Most of the research assumes the travel purchase consists of a high involvement decision. However little or no research exists on travel decisions that occur as a result of impulse or spur of the moment decisions. Such decision making may be relevant to the city break purchase and as such will be examined more closely in this research.

### **3.7.2 Information Search in Travel Decisions**

There is little doubt that the travel decision represents one of the most interesting and complex information search scenarios for researchers. As Crotts (1999) points out many of the factors that have been shown to influence the information search for consumer durable goods, such as age, income, and education, show little or no effect in the case of tourism. Instead, trip specific variables such as the size of a traveller's evoked set (i.e. the number of alternatives seriously being considered), amount of pre-trip planning time available, distance involved, and the frequencies of repeat visitation to a destination have proven to be much more appropriate in explaining the information search behaviour undertaken by travellers. As we have seen the information search is usually the greatest among those who are inexperienced, perceive high risk, or need to make the best possible decision.

Moutinho (1987) states that the tourist buying decision is unique as it is an investment with no tangible return, with the decision making process usually being made over a considerable period of time. He points out that tourists do not expect tangible economic gain from a holiday, however the intangible gain of satisfaction is high on their expectations. The purchase of a holiday product often involves high risk and usually entails substantial financial outlay for something which cannot be seen or touched first hand before purchasing it. Thus he claims the decision to purchase a holiday or leisure break is usually preceded by a significant information search. Indeed, it has been argued (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983) that systematic search of external sources is used more frequently in holiday decisions than in other products.

However, it is also important, not to assume that all travel purchases are preceded by extensive information search behaviour. Indeed research has shown that information search in tourism can vary quite significantly depending on circumstances. Fodness and Murray (1997) have shown that *purpose of visit* can be a key determinant of search behaviour.

In addition, and significantly for the city break decision, *type of holiday* can also be an important factor. For example, previous research shows main holidays tend to be better planned and involve greater information search than second or subsidiary ones (Marketing Sciences, 1982). However, important differences in relation to the direction and degree of the search still remain



unclear. Such data is valuable as it allows product providers and destination marketing organisations to plan for different information search behaviour based on the nature of visitors' trips.

### **3.8. Evaluation of Alternatives**

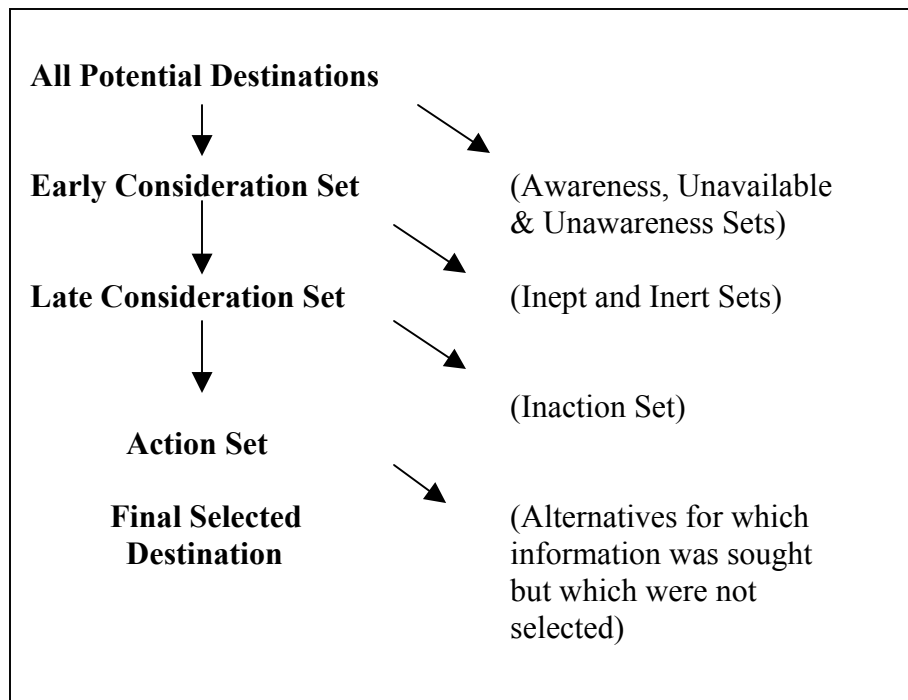
Following the search for information, potential purchasers usually engage in a process of evaluating possible alternatives. This normally involves weighing up the various options that they have come across from their search activities and selecting from them the most appropriate for their specific situation. In terms of the travel purchase, this usually involves the choice of destination for a holiday. A destination in this regard can include a country, city, resort or even hotel. One of the most common approaches referred to in the literature to explain how individuals decide on a destination is the concept of choice sets.

#### **3.8.1 Choice Sets**

This concept was introduced by Howard (1963) and later elaborated upon by Howard & Sheth (1969) and relates to the process where consumers mentally categorise brands according to their suitability to satisfy the purchaser's needs. Howard (1963) introduced the concepts of awareness, unawareness and evoked sets. An awareness set is comprised of all brands or alternatives that the buyer may be aware of at any given time, while unawareness set encompasses all the brands that the buyer is unaware of. Howard defines the evoked set as the collection of brands the buyer actually considers in his purchase decision process. Woodside & Sherrel (1977) were the first to attempt to conceptualise choice sets for leisure travel. In the case of holiday choice this involved potential tourists putting the names of destinations into the mental equivalent of file drawers to aid in the 'funnelling' or narrowing down process, necessary before a final destination is selected.

Woodside & Lysonski (1989) put forward a model of leisure destination choice that shows how consumers retrieve and categorise specific destinations from their long-term memories into four main destination categories or sets. First, there is the *consideration set*, which consists of all the destinations a potential tourist considers as possibilities in satisfying his/her travel goals. Second there is the *inert set* of destinations for which neither a positive nor negative evaluation has been made by a potential tourist, either through indifference or insufficiency of information. Third there is the *inept set* of destinations, which are the ones rejected by the potential tourist, possibly either because of negative experiences or through hearing negative comments. The fourth set is the *unavailable set*, consisting of those destinations perceived as too difficult to get to. As the final three of these sets are less likely to yield a selected destination, most attention has focused on the first, the consideration set. Many researchers and authors report that the funnelling process is done in a phased manner (Bettman & Park, 1980; Payne, 1976; Wright & Barbour, 1977). In the context of tourism, it has been suggested that the selection of a holiday destination involves a number of core phases: firstly the potential tourist develops an initial set of destinations that has generally been called an *early consideration* or *awareness set*; then he/she discards most of those destinations to form a smaller *late consideration* or *evoked set*; and finally selects a destination from those in the late consideration set (Thompson & Cooper, 1979; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Woodside & Sherrell, 1977; Um & Crompton, 1990). These stages or phases are illustrated in Figure 3.14. Central to this concept of choice sets is the notion that the search and evaluation process involved in selecting a destination occurs in a phased manner. Crompton (1992) defines the initial consideration set in a tourism context as “the destinations which a traveler is *considering as possible* vacation destinations within some period, e.g. a year.” He defines the late consideration set as “the destinations which a traveler is *considering as probable* destinations within some period of time.”

**Figure 3.14**  
**Relationships between the Central Choice Sets**

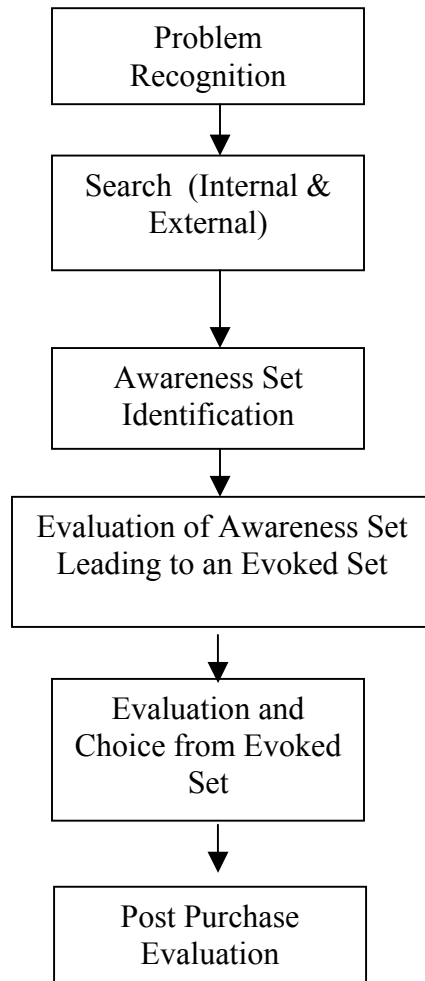


*Source:* Crompton & Ankomah (1993)

The choice sets structure suggests that there is essentially a two-phase information search process. Because of this, Le Blanc (1989) pointed out the traditional five-stage decision making model should be expanded to six-stages, to reflect this concept. This can be seen in Figure 3.15.

It is important to note that this decision process reflects consumer information processing in an extensive decision making situation. As LeBlanc (1989, p.8) points out, “for less complex decision making, the consumer would not have to activate stage 2 external search and stage 3 awareness set development.”

**Figure 3.15**  
**Six Stage Decision Making Model (LeBlanc, 1989)**



Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) indicate that the choice set approach, which focuses primarily on destination choice, was initiated as an alternative and more practical model to the broader behavioural approaches, which were generally criticized as being too complex and difficult to test empirically. Therefore choice set research seeks to bring to light more applicable results to destination choice behaviours which explains its popularity with many tourism researchers who find it quite logical and workable. For example, Crompton (1992, p.431) states that the choice-sets structure, with the use of a survey, allows destination marketers to “identify the percentage of target market in each choice set and assess their success in transforming people in each set into visitors to their destination.” Such usage of the choice set concept can be quite beneficial for

destination planners and marketers. However the choice-set approach is not without its limitations. One of the main criticisms levied at it, relates to the fact that the approach tends to be deterministic in nature (Ben-Akiva & Bruno, 1995). Sirakaya & Woodside (2005, p.824) also highlight an important weakness:

*choice-set models consider the decision-making process as monolithic because they almost become immune once the initial sets have been processed. Time and situational factors such as availability of 'last-minute' information (e.g. the safety or security of the destination, or a newly promoted destination) have been marginalized.*

Thus, although choice-set models provide a useful and practical way to analyse the destination choice process, they are nonetheless limited in their ability to give a broad and in-depth view of what is essentially a complex and multi-layered activity. Acceptance of the choice sets concept means that the evaluation stage of the decision making process is in fact carried out twice - firstly, as a means to formulate the late consideration set of destinations and secondly to make a final selection from this group.

One of the weaknesses of the choice sets concept is - like many of the other previously reviewed models and concepts - it does not take into account recent changes in travel purchasing behaviour. The concept assumes that the visitor has time and resources to enter an extensive decision making process, choosing between a wide range of destinations. However, this is not the case for a significant number of travel decisions today, particularly ones of a last minute nature. Such behaviour, unfortunately, does not tend to be reflected in existing travel decision models.

### **3.8.2 Aspects to the Evaluation Process**

Shiffman & Kanuk (1997), state that when evaluating potential alternatives, consumers tend to use two types of information:

- (1) a 'list' of brands from which they plan to make their selection, and
- (2) the criteria they will use to evaluate each brand.

#### **3.8.2.1 Selection List**

The evoked set (late consideration set) usually represents the list of brands the consumer will make his/her final selection from. This consists of a small number of alternatives the consumer is familiar with, remembers, and finds acceptable. Thus the evoked set will typically contain only a subset of the total number of alternatives available to the consumer and emerges after the funnelling process that precedes any destination selection. This explains how the decision making procedure is simplified so a potential tourist is required to process only a fraction of the destination-related information to which he or she could be exposed. As Shiffman & Kanuk (1997, p.563) point out "making a selection from a *sample* of all possible brands is a human characteristic that helps simplify the decision making process."

#### **3.8.2.2 Evaluative Criteria**

The criteria consumers use to evaluate the brands that constitute their evoked sets are usually expressed in terms of important product attributes. A tourism destination, for example, will be evaluated on attributes and criteria that are deemed important to the individual tourist. Certain attributes, or groups of attributes, may be sought to fulfil an underlying motivation in a tourist to go on holiday to a particular destination. For example, in choosing a sun holiday the range of activities for kids may be a particularly important attribute for one person, while for someone else, the quality of the nightlife might be the overriding feature sought. Corey (1996) suggests that studies concerned with destination choice have focused on identifying these dominant attributes that impact on choice. Consumers evaluating alternative destinations tend to evaluate a relatively consistent set of factors across the different competing alternatives. Some studies such as Fisher & Price (1991), Corey (1996), Dann (1996) have consistently come up with similar attributes or criteria which consumers use to evaluate destinations. These include the following:

- Price and value for money
- Accessibility and travel costs
- Hospitality of host nation and people
- Activities available
- Facilities available
- Scenic beauty
- Environmental awareness
- Historical and cultural interests
- Opportunity for rest and relaxation
- Entertainment available
- Shopping facilities

Criteria such as quality and value for money are more difficult to judge due to the tourism product being intangible and in many cases located far from the potential tourist.

### ***3.8.2.3 Determinants of Evaluative Criteria***

The individual will make his or her choice based on the importance or salience of the attributes of the destination. Most attention is paid to factors that are most strongly connected with his or her needs. Engel et al. (1995) point out that situational factors will often have an important influence on the criterion's salience. For example, a person travelling with a partner may attach more salience to particular attributes of a destination than if he or she was travelling with a friend.

Goodall (1991, p.67) sees the holiday-maker's evaluative criteria as being determined by the goals the traveller sets out – “goals range from the general, e.g. attractive scenery, to the very specific, e.g. package holiday with day-time flights.” These goals represent the criteria against which the potential holiday-maker will compare information gathered on each alternative – “the information gathered is filtered to form naive images which the holiday-maker compares with his/her evaluative image to establish whether or not holiday goals will be met.” This comparing

and evaluating is carried out by consumers through the employment of a series of heuristics or decision rules.

### **3.8.3 Decision Rules**

Consumer decision rules are the strategies or procedures used by consumers to facilitate selection from choice alternatives (Shiffman & Kanuk, 1997). Decision rules can range from very simplistic procedures that require very little cognitive input (e.g. a habitual purchase) to very complicated ones that require considerably more time and processing effort by consumers. In a marketing context such rules are a result of consumers constantly being exposed to more information than they can cope with. Consequently, they adopt decision strategies or rules in order to simplify the choice process. Consumer decision rules can be broadly classified into two main categories, those that involve a compensatory process and those that use a non-compensatory procedure (Blackwell et al., 2001).

#### **3.8.3.1 Compensatory Decision Rules**

Under a compensatory decision rule, a perceived weakness of one attribute may be offset or compensated for by the perceived strength of another attribute. Blackwell et al. (2001) describe two types of compensatory rules, the simple additive and the weighted additive.

Simple Additive: Here the consumer simply counts the number of times each alternative is judged favourably in terms of the evaluative criteria. The choice is based on the alternative that has the greatest number of positive attributes. This type of decision rule is often associated with situations where the consumer's processing motivation or ability is limited.

Weighted Additive: This is a more complex form of the compensatory rule. The consumer evaluates alternatives in terms of each attribute and computes a weighted or summated score for each option. The calculated score reflects the alternative's relative merit as a potential purchase choice. This rule is at the basis of most well known multi-attribute models. Table 3.3 shows an example of this evaluation method, using the choice of an airline for a trip from London to Paris. Across the top of the table are the evoked set of brands that will be evaluated (in this case, BA, Ryanair, Easyjet, and Air France). Alongside these brands is an importance rating with which the



consumer is supposed to rank the various attributes that constitute the vertical axis of the table. We can see from the table, the consumer rates safety as the most important attribute, followed by price, and so on. The figures in the table represent the consumer's rating of each of the airlines under each attribute. This particular consumer rates BA and Air France highest for safety and time of flight, however, lowest for price.

**Table 3.3**  
**Multiattribute Choice Matrix**

<i>Attributes</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>Ryanair</i>	<i>Easyjet</i>	<i>Air France</i>	<i>Weighting</i>
Safety	10	9	9	10	10
Price	7	10	10	7	9
Time of Flight	10	9	8	10	8
Punctuality	9	10	9	8	7
Airport Used	10	8	9	10	6

Using the compensatory rule, the consumer creates an overall score for each brand or airline by multiplying the rating of the airline on each attribute by the importance attached to that attribute and adding the scores together. BA would score 10 x 10 (safety) plus 8 x 9 (price) plus 10 x 8 (time of flight) and so on. The result of such a process would be that Ryanair would be chosen with a score of 370 followed by BA (366), Easyjet (361), and Air France (359).

### **3.8.3.2 Non-Compensatory Decision Rules**

As the name suggests, non-compensatory decision rules do not allow consumers to balance a product's weakness on one attribute against its strong performance on another. Four non-compensatory rules are considered briefly here: *conjunctive*, *lexicographic*, *elimination by aspects*, and *disjunctive*.

*Conjunctive Decision Rule*: This is where options are eliminated from further consideration when they are perceived to have certain unacceptable features. The consumer establishes a separate minimally accepted level as a cut off point for each attribute. Each alternative is judged in

relation to these cut-off points. Failure to meet the cut-off for any attribute leads to rejection (e.g. a holiday villa which doesn't have a swimming pool is immediately eliminated). Because the conjunctive rule can result in many alternatives still meeting the minimum criteria, it is often necessary to apply an additional decision rule to make the final choice.

*Disjunctive Decision Rule:* This is the 'mirror image' of the conjunctive rule. In this case, a cut-off level for each attribute is also established (although it may be higher than the conjunctive rule). If an alternative meets or exceeds the cut-off for any attribute, it is accepted. Another decision rule may also be needed to attain a final choice outcome as a number of alternatives may exceed the cut-off point.

*Lexicographic Decision Rule:* For this decision rule the consumer first prioritises the different attributes in terms of perceived relevance or importance. The consumer then compares the various alternatives against the most important attribute, and if one is noticeably better, it is selected with no further evaluation. If two or more alternatives are judged to be equal on that attribute then they are compared on the second most important attribute. In the example in Table 3.3 the decision maker would look first at safety and rule out both Ryanair and Easyjet. The choice is thus reduced to BA and Air France. The next most important attribute creates a tie in the scoring. The third most important attribute (time of flight) does not help, as both alternatives are tied again. The matter is only sorted at the fourth attribute (punctuality) where BA scores higher than Air France, and is subsequently chosen. Thus a different decision rule results in a different choice: BA under the lexicographic model and Ryanair under the compensatory model.

*Elimination by Aspects Decision Rule:* This is similar to the conjunctive rule where alternatives are evaluated against minimum cut offs on attributes, but like the lexicographic process, evaluation starts with the most important attribute. Those alternatives exceeding the cut off point on the most important attribute are subsequently evaluated on the second most important attribute, and then the third, and so on until one alternative is finally selected.

These decision rules provide a useful framework from which to examine the complicated evaluative stage in the choice process. The extent to which these rules are employed by consumers in everyday purchasing is uncertain. However, they do act as a practical guideline for examining the often complicated mental processing that exists in choice making.

### **3.9 Purchase Decision Stage**

Having evaluated the alternatives the consumer will choose the one most suited to his or her requirements. However a number of decisions may still be required before the actual purchase is made. These include:

- (a) When to buy,
- (b) Where to buy, and
- (c) How to pay.

Thus, even when initial product choice has been agreed, the consumer's decision making may be far from over. Indeed, for the tourism holiday decision these 'supplemental' decisions can be crucial. For example 'when to buy' is particularly poignant as people may be undecided whether to book well in advance to secure a place for a particular destination or wait for a late minute deal.

Consumers who enter the purchase stage of the process can vary greatly in terms of their assuredness and knowledge. This relates usually to how much involvement there has been in the information search and how extensive the problem solving has been. Engel et al. (1995) present this consumer preparedness in three categories:

- *Fully planned purchase* – both product and brand are chosen in advance
- *Partially planned purchase* – there is an intention to buy a given product, but the choice of brand is deferred until shopping is completed
- *Unplanned purchase* – both the product and brand are chosen at point of sale

The fully planned purchase is usually characterized by an extensive or prolonged period of search, with particular emphasis attached to selection criteria and/or performance expectations. The partially planned purchase may also have extensive information search characteristics but there are still some unresolved issues with regard to the exact brand choice. This may often hinge on promotional influences at the point of sale. The unplanned purchase however is usually not well researched and is often a spur of the moment decision.

Purchases can also be categorized according to the degree of previous experience the consumer has had with the product. Shiffman & Kanuk (2000) divide purchases into three types: trial purchases, repeat purchases, and long-term commitment purchases. When a consumer purchases a product (or brand) for the first time, this transaction would be considered a trial purchase (for example the first time a traveller chooses a particular airline). When the consumer has purchased the product or brand before, he or she is said to be repeat purchasing - this is often associated with brand loyalty. Finally, consumers are said to be engaging in long term commitment purchases when they choose products or brands that will tie them to the product for a relatively long time (for example, the decision to buy a holiday home).

*How* and *where* the purchase is made are also important factors in the decision process. For tourism purchases this usually relates to the method of booking used by the consumer. Traditionally travel agents have been the main channel through which consumers have made holiday bookings. However with the expansion of the internet and the development of online booking facilities, the whole purchasing behaviour of tourism consumers has been transformed. This has had important implications for how and where consumers make reservations. In fact the travel and tourism industry has been one of the main embracers of online purchasing, particularly the airline sector. This has meant a rethink, by many product providers, on how the tourism product should be distributed. As Laws (2002) points out, gaining an understanding of the way the internet is used in the purchase of travel and tourism products presents “many practical benefits to marketing decision-makers when it comes to the design and delivery of marketing strategy.” For the tourism consumer the internet has offered the possibility of both a useful source of information and a convenient point of sale. In the context of the city break travel

decision – as mentioned in the previous chapter – the internet is generally believed to play a significant role. However, the extent and exact nature of this role is not clear and needs to be explored in more detail.

### 3.10 Post Purchase Evaluation

Customer satisfaction is the key outcome of any purchase and consumption process. This satisfaction concept thus remains central to the post purchase evaluation stage. Researchers have long been interested in what this satisfaction consists of and how it is created. One popular approach to understanding customer satisfaction is the disconfirmation of expectations model as described by Oliver (1980) and widely used in marketing literature. Briefly, this theory posits that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the result of a comparison of pre-purchase *expectations* against actual *outcomes*. Thus, the expectations that consumers formulate prior to purchase and the actual way the product/service performs are the principal measures in this evaluation process.

Consumers form expectations based on many factors including, advertising and other communications, past experience, perceived service alternatives and personal needs. Consumer expectations, according to Engell et al. (1995), fall into three categories:

1. *Equitable performance* – a normative judgment reflecting the performance one ought to receive given the costs and efforts devoted to purchase and use
2. *Ideal performance* – the optimum or hoped for ‘ideal’ performance level
3. *Expected performance* – what the performance probably will be

The third category, ‘expected performance,’ is the one most often used by consumers when assessing the outcome of the purchase. Alternatively, Zeithaml et al. (1993), when examining consumers’ expectations of services, concluded that customers assess service performance by using two standards. First, there is the desired level of service or what could be called the maximum acceptable service, and second there is the level of service they consider adequate or what could be termed the minimum acceptable service. In between these two levels of

expectations there is what the authors call the ‘zone of tolerance,’ which is a level of service that is not quite ideal but acceptable. See Figure 3.16.

**Figure 3.16**  
**Evaluation of Level of Service**

Desired Service	Zone of Tolerance	Adequate Service
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*Source:* Adapted from V. Zeithaml, L. Berry, and A. Parasuraman, (1993)

It is important to note also that service expectations are measured against service performance in the mind of the consumer. It is the ‘perceived’ service performance and not necessarily the actual service performance that matters. Thus, it is the consumer’s perception of their service experience that is paramount to the satisfaction outcome. This is particularly true for tourism products. Moutinho (1987) points out that tourist’s satisfaction with a destination is dependent on a post purchase evaluation which involves weighing prior expectations against actual results (tourist performance evaluation). He points out that tourists do not buy products: they buy the expectation of benefits. It is the manner in which these benefits are delivered (or performed, in the case of services) that is crucial to the consumer’s overall satisfaction with the product.

Lounsbury & Hoopes (1985) found that an important dimension of tourist satisfaction relates to relaxation and leisure. Essentially, this involves the way personal plans work out in practice, particularly in relation to: emotional and physical well-being; the ‘pace of life’ experienced; opportunities for familiar and new leisure activity participation; and the feeling of enjoyment associated with each experience. Moutinho (1987) suggests that consumers appraise the tourism product performance along two sets of dimensions, *instrumental* and *expressive*. Instrumental relates to the performance of the physical product and expressive relates to the psychological level of performance, which includes the tourist’s response and feelings towards the product. Engel et al. (1995) concur and state that, unless both these elements (which they refer to as ‘cognitive’ and ‘affective’) are taken into account by consumers, the measurement process will be incomplete.

### **3.10.1 Disconfirmation of Expectations**

So what are the possible outcomes from such a measurement or post purchase evaluative process? As stated, the desired outcome for both the consumer and product provider is a sense of satisfaction, or more specifically a gratification of the initiating need. However this desired outcome is not always achieved. According to the disconfirmation of expectations model, post purchase evaluation has three possible outcomes:

- a) Positive Disconfirmation – this is where product performance has disconfirmed the consumer's expectations, but in a positive way. In other words the perceived experience has surpassed expectations. This leads to customer satisfaction and is often a forerunner to repeat purchases.
- b) Simple Confirmation – this is where product performance equals customer expectations. It usually results in satisfaction but in a more neutral way than the previous case.
- c) Negative Disconfirmation – here, performance is worse than expected and this results in customer dissatisfaction. This is the worst-case outcome for both consumers and product providers.

An expectation that is disconfirmed negatively, creates a state of 'psychological discomfort'. This is commonly referred to in the marketing literature as *cognitive dissonance*. This theory suggests that consumers regularly experience discomfort or dissonance once they have made a decision to buy a product. This 'buyer's regret,' as Engel et al. (1995) refer to it, can occur either before or after a purchase, but always once some commitment to an alternative has been made. Essentially the discomfort is caused by consumer's unease about acquiring the drawbacks of the chosen brand and losing the benefits of the rejected ones. Because purchase decisions often require compromise of some kind, post purchase dissonance is quite normal. Nevertheless it is likely to leave consumers with doubts and conflict in relation to their pre purchase beliefs or actions – a situation that often results in consumers changing their attitudes to conform with their purchase behaviour. The consumer can rationalize the decision as being the right choice, seek out information that supports the choice (while avoiding sources of dissonant information), try to convince friends or peers of the positive features of the product, or look to known satisfied owners for confirmation and reassurance (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

Most marketing and consumer behaviour researchers agree that product providers can help to ease this consumer discomfort by providing supportive information for consumers. Information that assures them they have made the right choice. In addition they can offer warranties or guarantees to ease peace of mind. It is imperative for product providers to ensure that consumers do not conclude that they have made a bad or the wrong choice, as such a summation would almost surely result in lost future patronage and even more critically, the possibility of negative word of mouth.

In the case of the tourism product such as overseas travel, the purchaser will often doubt the wisdom of their choice and have a need for reassurance. Cooper et al. (1998) point out that this tourist dissonance can be reduced through guarantees or telephone help lines to deal with queries. It can also be reduced by the reassurance of someone who has experienced a similar trip. Moutinho (1987) stresses the importance of the tourist's perceived level of reward in terms of benefits received to his or her future decision making. He points out that the non-repeat buying decision almost always directs the tourist to other holiday destinations.

However, it is important to point out that the intention not to return to a destination does not necessarily stem from negative experiences or dissonance. In many cases people perceive destinations as somewhere on a list of intended places to visit that can subsequently be ticked off once the trip is finished – a kind of “been there, done that” approach. This again is a behaviour pattern that is not usually reflected in many of the traditional decision making models, but certainly merits further examination.

### **3.11 Factors That Influence the Decision Process**

The post purchase evaluation stage concludes decision making in terms of a sequential process. However, it is important to note that there are a number of factors and variables that can, and do, influence this process. These are described and categorised in various ways by academics - typically under headings such as; personal, socio-cultural, psychological, external, and internal, factors. However, regardless of how they are grouped the variables tend to remain the same. Many of these have already been mentioned or discussed during this literature review including,



motivation, information processing, demographic factors, psychographic factors, and attitudes. Some of the others will now be discussed - in particular those that are considered most relevant to this research.

### **3.11.1. Situational Factors**

It is important, when trying to understand a tourist's decision making process, to consider the context in which he or she is operating in. The context refers to the things occurring in the tourist's life that affect how he/she feels, thinks learns or behaves. One of the most important aspects in this regard is the *situational influences* that affect the decision process. This relates to "those factors particular to a time and place of observation" (Belk 1975, cited in Decrop, 1999a, p.109). Situational factors can be particularly influential in travel decisions, mainly due to the nature of the tourism product and the circumstances in which it is purchased. Belk suggests five types of situational factors;

- Physical surroundings – this includes weather, specifics of a location, tangible signs and displays of merchandise, and other materials. Weather can be a particularly strong situational factor in travel decisions and is often a key determinant in people choosing sun holidays.
- Social surroundings – these include other people and their characteristics, roles and interactions. Social interactions can act as important information sources and influence decision making.
- Temporal perspective – this includes particulars of the moment around decision making (e.g. the time of day or the season of the year) or possible time constraints facing the individual. Important factors such as school holidays, bank holidays, unexpected free time, and time elapsed since the last holiday also come under this.
- Task definition – this describes the orientation, intent, role, or frame of a person, through which certain aspects of the environment may become relevant. This can affect the criteria a person uses to select different products.
- Antecedent states - these refer to momentary moods or conditions that "colour" the perception, evaluation, and acceptance of the environment present. For example, an

unexpected windfall could change a person's perspective on what they normally do for a holiday – it could spur them to take a cruise or a round the world trip.

There is no doubt that situational factors play an important part in many travel decisions. A number of qualitative studies examining travel motivation and decision making have uncovered important situational factors at play in people's decision behaviour (see Decrop & Snelders, 2004).

### **3.11.2 Consumer Resources**

As well as situational influences, the tourism decision is also affected by, what Blackwell et al. (2001, p.84) call, *consumer resources*. This mainly refers to two key consumer resources - time, and money. Without either of these, leisure travel is unlikely to occur - mainly due to the necessity of free time and disposable income. Of course the availability of these two factors constantly varies. Cooper et al. (1998, p.45) refer to a leisure paradox which occurs over people's lifetime. This describes the notion that when people have a lot of free time, e.g. in their teens, early twenties, or retired, they tend not to have much disposable income. By contrast, when they are at their highest earning powers (late middle age) they have little free time due to family and work commitments. Such conflicts between time and money are constantly at play.

### **3.11.3 Socio-Cultural Influences**

Socio-cultural variables are also considered important in the travel decision process. All consumers are influenced by the social and cultural structures in which they are embedded (Decrop, 1999a). The most basic structure which most people belong to is their family. This represents the primary source of learning for people's basic sets of values, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. In travel research, the influence of the family is constantly in evidence. In many cases the family is the primary decision making unit often displaying a complex and varied pattern of roles and functions. Even when the travel decision does not involve the family, people can still be highly influenced by certain family members.

Outside of this important unit, people's friends and associates also play a crucial role. The opinions and suggestions of close friends and peers can carry significant weight when travel decisions are being made. In some cases, where a number of friends travel together, interesting group decision making patterns may emerge. As Decrop (1999a, p.111) points out "the level of communication, the mode of decision making (consensus, bargaining, vote, dictatorship), and the result of confrontation (agreement versus conflict) are important determinants of group decision processes."

These variables - along with others discussed previously - represent the main influencing factors on the travel purchase decision. All will be explored further in the primary research stage, in order to get a clearer picture of their effect on the city break travel decision.

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter has examined and reviewed the literature in relation to motivation and decision making, particularly, in the context of a travel purchase. The tourism product was revealed to be different from most other service products. However, many of the assumptions highlighted regarding the nature of the product were shown to be unreflective of changes occurring in the travel and tourism industry in recent years. The city break product, for example, does not easily fit in with some of the perceived characteristics of travel products – in particular, characteristics such as; long lead in time, seasonal susceptibility, and high involvement.

A review of the tourism decision making models showed a variety of attempts by numerous researchers to describe and depict the travel decision. These ranged from Moutinho's detailed overview of tourist behaviour to Middleton's stimulus response approach. However, many were observed to have similar weaknesses and shortcomings. Most are based on little or no empirical research and therefore have not been tested in reality. The majority of models also assume the traveller to be a rational decision maker, which of course is not always the case. In addition, and crucially, most fail to reflect some of the significant contemporary developments in travel purchasing, such as the growing importance of the internet and the increased trend towards last minute bookings. Crotts (1999, p.152) makes a valid point when he says:

*The term travel decision-making usually connotes an image of a consumer or group of travelers (e.g. family) carefully evaluating the attributes of a set of tourism destinations and travel services and rationally selecting the one that most clearly solves a clearly recognized need for the least cost. It has a rational and functional connotation. However, although consumers do make decisions in this manner, many others make purchase decisions with little apparent mental effort.*

In terms of the different stages of the decision process, the literature highlighted the crucial role of motivation at the initial stages of the travel decision. The push and pull concept was seen as particularly useful in explaining travel motives with many researchers utilizing this approach. However, although extensive, the travel motivation literature did show some significant gaps. For example, very few studies addressed the important issue of motivational heterogeneity across leisure trips, i.e. the notion that people use different motives for different leisure trips.

The search for information was also noted as a particularly important part of the travel decision. Although many factors influence the search effort, the nature and characteristics of the trip proved to be the most important. In other words, the type of trip a person takes in terms of its length, importance, cost, etc. is the principal determinant of the extensiveness of the information search. Interestingly, most of the literature still portrays the travel information search as protracted and highly involved - failing to take into account the increasing number of travel decisions that are made quickly and, in some cases, impulsively.

A similar situation emerged in relation to the evaluation and purchase stages. In both cases, much of the literature portrays the prospective traveller as an extensive problem solving purchaser. This was particularly evident with the choice sets concept where travel decisions are assumed to involve two information search exercises and two evaluation processes. This again fails to account for the growing number of travellers who book late and engage in very low levels of problem solving.

Such gaps in the literature highlight a failure by many researchers to acknowledge different aspects of travel behaviour that do not conform to the traditional view. There is a growing consensus that decision making research needs to be more reflective of new and emerging travel behaviour trends. Some, like Sirakaya & Woodside (2005, p.825), point out that decision-making

styles are individualistic and therefore “developing a model that fits all decision-makers and every decision situation may not be realistic.” Interestingly, they suggest that future models should focus more on the nature and purpose of people’s visits to give a more realistic perspective of travel decision-making;

*Priori segmentation of travel markets according to trip purpose (such as pleasure vacation versus family and friends, leisure travel versus business) is an approach useful for future models. Different segments, might have dissimilar methods of approaching problem solving and decision-making. For example, a potential traveler who is interested in traveling to a location where she/he has friends or relatives might follow different decision-making rules (i.e., low-involvement, less risky conditions) than a person who is taking a pleasure vacation trip for the first time to a new location (high-involvement, high perceived risk).*

This notion of different segments having different methods of decision making is an important point. The city break market is a good example of this. As pointed out in the previous chapter city breaks have become increasingly popular in recent years and yet there has been little or no empirical investigation into the motivations and decision making behaviour involved in their purchase. Most of the weaknesses in the current tourism models have stemmed from their oversight of travel products such as city breaks.

In conclusion, this review of the literature has revealed a number of research gaps that need to be addressed in this investigation. These can be summarised into three main issues:

- 1) The need to gain a better understanding of the city break travel market, by examining both the travellers themselves and the trips they engage in.
- 2) The need to explore city break motivation and decision making, particularly in terms of its distinctiveness compared to other holiday decisions.
- 3) The need to examine the significance and influence of type of trip on decision making behaviour.

Having highlighted the principal research issues in relation to this topic, the focus now turns to the research approach that will be necessary to successfully address them. The following chapter outlines and discusses relevant methodological issues in this regard.

# Chapter Four

## Research Methodology

## **4.1 Introduction**

The main purpose of this book is to investigate the topic of city break tourism and in particular, the characteristics, motivations and decision making behaviour involved in taking such leisure trips. This chapter explains and discusses the methodologies adopted to investigate this topic. An overview of the different research approaches is outlined and a justification for the chosen methods used for this study is offered. In addition, the reasoning behind site selection and the different sampling processes employed is explained. The limitations and restrictions faced by the researcher in carrying out this study are also outlined. However, it is important to begin this chapter with a clear vision of what the focus of the study is.

## **4.2 Aims and Objectives**

From the preceding chapters it is evident that city break tourism is, on the one hand, an important and growing travel niche, and on the other, a seriously overlooked area of tourism research. As previously pointed out, very little empirical evidence exists on why and how people decide to take city break trips. This research aims to address this knowledge gap. The main purpose of this study is to better understand city break travellers, their trips, and in particular their motivations and decision making behaviour. In order to achieve this, the following research aims have been set out:

1. To examine the city break travel phenomenon by reviewing existing literature and studies on the topic.
2. To develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists.
3. To analyse the distinctiveness of a city break holiday by finding out its principal characteristics and features.
4. To investigate the motivations and decision-making behaviour of city break holidaymakers.
5. To examine the influence of ‘type of trip’ in the travel decision making process.

In order to address these aims in a focused manner, the research concentrates on visitors to Dublin city only. This reflects the exploratory nature of this investigation and the justification for such an approach is outlined later in this chapter.

### **4.3 Review of Methodological Approaches**

Selecting an overall paradigm in which to root the research study is one of the first tasks facing a researcher. The term paradigm refers to “the progress of scientific practice based on people’s philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge,” (Hussey and Hussey, 1997, p.47). In other words, it refers to how research should be conducted. Any process of formal inquiry is said to be guided by a set of basic beliefs. These ideas which form the basis of a research paradigm or philosophy are designed to answer three questions: “what is the nature of reality?” (ontology), “what is the relationship between the researcher and knowledge?” (epistemology), and “how should the researcher find out knowledge?” (methodology) (Guba, 1990, p.18).

Today, two major traditions exist, the quantitative research model and the qualitative research model. According to Peterson (1994, p.487) quantitative research is required when the goal is to develop important, but limited information from each individual and to talk with a sizeable number of respondents to allow for inferences to be drawn about the population at large. In contrast, she describes qualitative research methods as involving detailed and in-depth conversations with a few people where the aim is to gather extensive and rich information.

The argument about which tradition is better or more effective has been contested for many years, with people putting forward strong cases for both approaches. It is not this researcher’s intention to enter this debate but to merely note it, and to explain each method’s relevance in the context of this study. The important thing for researchers is to be aware of, and understand, the paradigmatic options available to them, so that an informed and appropriate choice can be made. Decrop (1999b, p.340) also points out the importance of the researcher’s interests when choosing between methods;



*...The basic trade-off is between qualitative and quantitative methodology. The decision depends not only on the nature of the topic to be addressed, but also on the investigator's personal interests.*

Because the choice of paradigm is of great importance to the direction and outcome of the research effort, it is important to explain each of the traditions in turn and examine their suitability (or not) for this research.

#### **4.3.1 Quantitative Research**

The quantitative approach is often termed the traditional, the positivist, the experimental, or the empiricist paradigm, with its philosophy stemming from an empiricist tradition established by such authorities as Comte, Mill, Durkheim, Newton, and Locke (Smith, 1983). The thinking is seen to be:

*...rooted in a realist ontology, that is, the belief that there exists a reality out there, driven by immutable natural laws.... Once committed to a realist ontology, the positivist is constrained to practice an objectivist epistemology. If there is a real world operating according to natural laws, then the inquirer must behave in ways that put questions to nature and allow nature to answer back directly...*

(Guba, 1990, p.19)

Research information in this paradigm is usually quantified numerically with statistical summarisations the norm. As Schott (2002, p.167) highlights, the increased sophistication of a variety of data analysis packages, such as MINITAB and SPSS, has enabled the researcher to economise greatly on time spent analysing data. Additionally, one of the main advantages of adopting a quantitative approach is the ability of the researcher to sample the views of a large cohort relatively quickly with less time and cost constraints compared to a qualitative approach (Thornton, 1995). However, as Dinan (1999, p.144) highlights, a quantitative research instrument such as a questionnaire is limited when investigating complex issues (e.g. attitudes, opinions and motives). For such issues researchers need to probe deeper into the mind of respondents to uncover information that is difficult to elicit with a standardised survey. As Patton (1990) points out, the main difference between qualitative and quantitative research resides in the trade-off between depth and breadth. Although quantitative methods can collect data across wide samples (breadth), the data can appear very dry in comparison with the very rich data provided

by qualitative studies (depth). Thus, the qualitative tradition is particularly relevant in the social science arena where people and their behaviour are the main focus of enquiry.

#### **4.3.2 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is simultaneously referred to as natural inquiry, interpretive research, hermeneutical research, and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It began as a countermovement to the positivist tradition in the late 19th century through such writers as Dilthey, Weber, and Kant (Smith, 1983). The newer qualitative research model is based on different ontological and epistemological and methodological beliefs.

In this paradigm, "...realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (Guba, 1990, p.17).

In other words reality is something that is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in a study. In the qualitative paradigm knowledge is seen as relative (time, context, culture, value bound). The discovery of 'knowledge' (epistemology) is understood as the product of an interaction between researcher and researched. Unlike in the quantitative approach, here the researcher tries to minimise the distance between him- or herself and those being researched. The methods of this paradigm (methodology) in the search for 'meaning,' involve the analysis of rich 'context-bound' information leading to patterns or theories that help explain a phenomenon.

Essentially, the goal of the qualitative research paradigm is to provide a research methodology for "...understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). Table 4.1 outlines the main differences between the two approaches.

Tourism research has traditionally been dominated by quantitative research, mainly because as Decrop (1999b, p.336) indicates, "researchers feel more comfortable with statistical probabilities than with theoretical conjecture...they overlook the complexity of many research problems where reality is multiple-faceted and socially constructed."

Rather than feeling obliged to choose one method over another an increasing number of researchers are realising the advantages of combining the two approaches. As Hartman (1988, p.96) points out, a combination of various methods offers opportunities for counterchecks and for complementary information at different levels.

**Table 4.1**  
**Basic Differences Between the Positivist and the Interpretivist Paradigms**

<i>Assumptions</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Interpretivism</i>
<b>Nature of reality</b>	Objective, tangible, single	Socially constructed, multiple
<b>Goal of research</b>	Explanation, strong prediction	Understanding, weak prediction
<b>Focus of interest</b>	What is general, average and representative	What is specific, unique, and deviant
<b>Knowledge generated</b>	Laws Absolute (time, context, and value free)	Meanings Relative (time, context, culture, value bound)
<b>Subject/Researcher relationship</b>	Rigid separation	Interactive, cooperative, participative
<b>Desired Information</b>	How many people think and do a specific thing, or have a specific problem	What some people think and do, what kind of problems they are confronted with, and how they deal with them

*Source:* Decrop (1999b)

### 4.3.3 Combining Methods

Creswell (1994) cites Campbell and Fisk's psychological study in 1959 as an example of one of the first occasions when more than one method was used in research. By 1978 Denzin used the term triangulation, a term similarly used by military strategists, "to argue for the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Creswell, 1994). Triangulation means looking at the same phenomenon or research question from more than one source of data. Information coming from different angles is used to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research problem. It aims to limit personal and methodological biases and enhance a study's trustworthiness (Decrop, 1999b). Denzin (1978) identifies four basic types of triangulation:

1. data triangulation: the use of a variety of data sources in a study;
2. investigator triangulation: the use of several different researchers to interpret the same body of data;
3. theory triangulation: the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data, and,
4. methodological triangulation: the use of multiple methods to study a single problem.

Jick (1979) differentiated between two types of triangulation; *within methods triangulation*, which involves using different types of data collection techniques within the one method (e.g. a survey and an experiment), and the increasingly popular *between methods triangulation* which draws on both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques (e.g., a survey and in-depth interviews). Either way the aim is to achieve more credible and dependable information through maximising the strengths and minimising the weaknesses of each method. Philip (1998) suggests that researchers should think beyond the myopic quantitative-qualitative divide when it comes to devising a suitable methodology for their research, and select methods (quantitative, qualitative or a combination of the two) that best satisfy the needs of specific research projects.

In addition, Creswell (1994) presents a number of authors in the literature who support the notion of combining qualitative and quantitative methods including, Greene, Caracelli, & Graham (1989), Mathison (1988) and Swanson (1992). Greene et al. (1989) put forward five reasons for the combining of research methods in a single study:

- triangulation which seeks to neutralise bias and demonstrate convergence in results
- examination of overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon (e.g., peeling the layers of an onion)
- developmental purpose, wherein the first method is used sequentially to help inform the second method
- to find contradictions and fresh perspectives
- to add scope and breadth to a study

However mixing methods from qualitative and quantitative traditions is not universally accepted and has generated much debate and discussion. Whether paradigms should be linked with methods has led to different schools of thinking. As Creswell (1994) points out, on one side you have the “purists” who feel that paradigms and methods should not be mixed, on the other side are the “pragmatists” who support the integration of methods in a single study, while in the middle you have the “situationalists”, who believe that certain methods are appropriate for specific situations (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). However there seems to be a growing consensus in recent years that a false dichotomy has existed between qualitative and quantitative approaches and that researchers should make the most efficient use of both paradigms in understanding social phenomena.

Combined research designs take many forms and variations. Creswell (1994) puts forward three models of combined designs which he has found in the literature. The first model he calls the **two-phase design** approach, in which the qualitative and quantitative studies are presented and discussed in two distinct phases. The second is the **dominant-less dominant design** in which one paradigm dominates the research. However the study also contains a small component drawn from the alternative paradigm. The third design model is called the **mixed-methodology design**, in which the research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches throughout the study. Miller and Crabtree in Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.343) suggest at least four different formats in which qualitative and quantitative methods are integrated within a multimethod approach. These are:

1. Concurrent design
2. Nested design
3. Sequential design
4. Combination design

Similarly, Morse (1991) presents two forms of methodological triangulation: *simultaneous*, using both qualitative and quantitative methods at the same time, and *sequential*, using the results of one method for planning the next method. However she contends that the two paradigms cannot be weighted equally in a single study and suggests that capital and small letters be used to indicate the weighting (e.g., QUANT or quant). Snadden and Brown (1991) used such a sequential design, in their medical research study. A questionnaire measuring attitudes concerning asthma was used to identify respondents reporting high levels of stigma. These respondents were then interviewed using interpreted research methods.

Perhaps the best way to sum up the discussion on mixed methods is to simply state that qualitative and quantitative methods should be viewed as complementing rather than competing with each other. Each has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses and when viewed in that context the argument more usefully moves on to each methods suitability and aptness in addressing the research aims and objectives.

#### **4.4 Selected Research Methods for this Study**

When choosing the best methodological approach to take for this study it was decided to refrain from adopting a polarised stance on the qualitative versus quantitative debate. With a large number of authors supporting the combining of methods, this idea was given serious consideration. The following statement by Jennifer Greene seems to sum up the thinking on the matter.

*...rather than believing that one must choose to align with one paradigm or another, I advocate a paradigm of choices. A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of **methodological appropriateness** as the primary criterion for judging methodological*

*quality. The issue then becomes ... whether one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the enquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available.*

(Greene in Patton, 1990, pp.38-39)

This 'methodological appropriateness' is an approach that is advocated by many authors and therefore was examined when considering the research design and methods for this study. The research aims and the resources available were considered carefully and in the end a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was seen as the most appropriate approach to take in order to meet the study's aims. As Robson (1993, p.307) states:

*... so we have qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. Most real world study produces data which call for both qualitative and quantitative analysis and it is important that you [the researcher] are able to deal competently with both aspects.*

The decision to use a combined methods design was influenced by previous tourism studies which had successfully employed such an approach. Finn et al. (2000, p.33) presents two such studies which illustrate how different methods of data collection can be combined. One of these studies, Squire (1994), is essentially in the phenomenological research tradition employing qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus groups to collect data. However, in addition, questionnaires were also used to get quantitative information on types of visitor. Similarly, Woodward, Green, & Hebron (1988, p.101) use a combination of methods successfully in their leisure study. The authors' satisfaction with such an approach is clear from the following:

*The initial decision to combine various research methods, rather than relying on either one large survey or an intense interview study, has been vindicated. A wealth of information was obtained, almost all of which could be analyzed and used, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches worked well.*

Within the combined methods design, a *sequential* triangulation approach, as outlined by Morse (1991) and Millar & Crabtree (1994), was considered particularly suitable. This consists of conducting two phases to the research project, with the results of the first phase essential for the planning of the next. A quantitative study was undertaken first (Phase One), which provided crucial data and knowledge that was necessary to carry out the second phase (Phase Two), a more in-depth qualitative analysis. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods, with the qualitative paradigm being the dominant one. Such an approach was chosen as it follows the *methodological appropriateness* idea mentioned earlier. In other words, the quantitative (Phase One) aspect was deemed the most appropriate approach for eliciting data in relation to the characteristics of city break visitors and the trips they take – while the qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate to uncover the motivation and decision making behaviour involved in these trips. In addition, specific data uncovered in Phase One was deemed useful in assisting the sampling process in Phase Two.

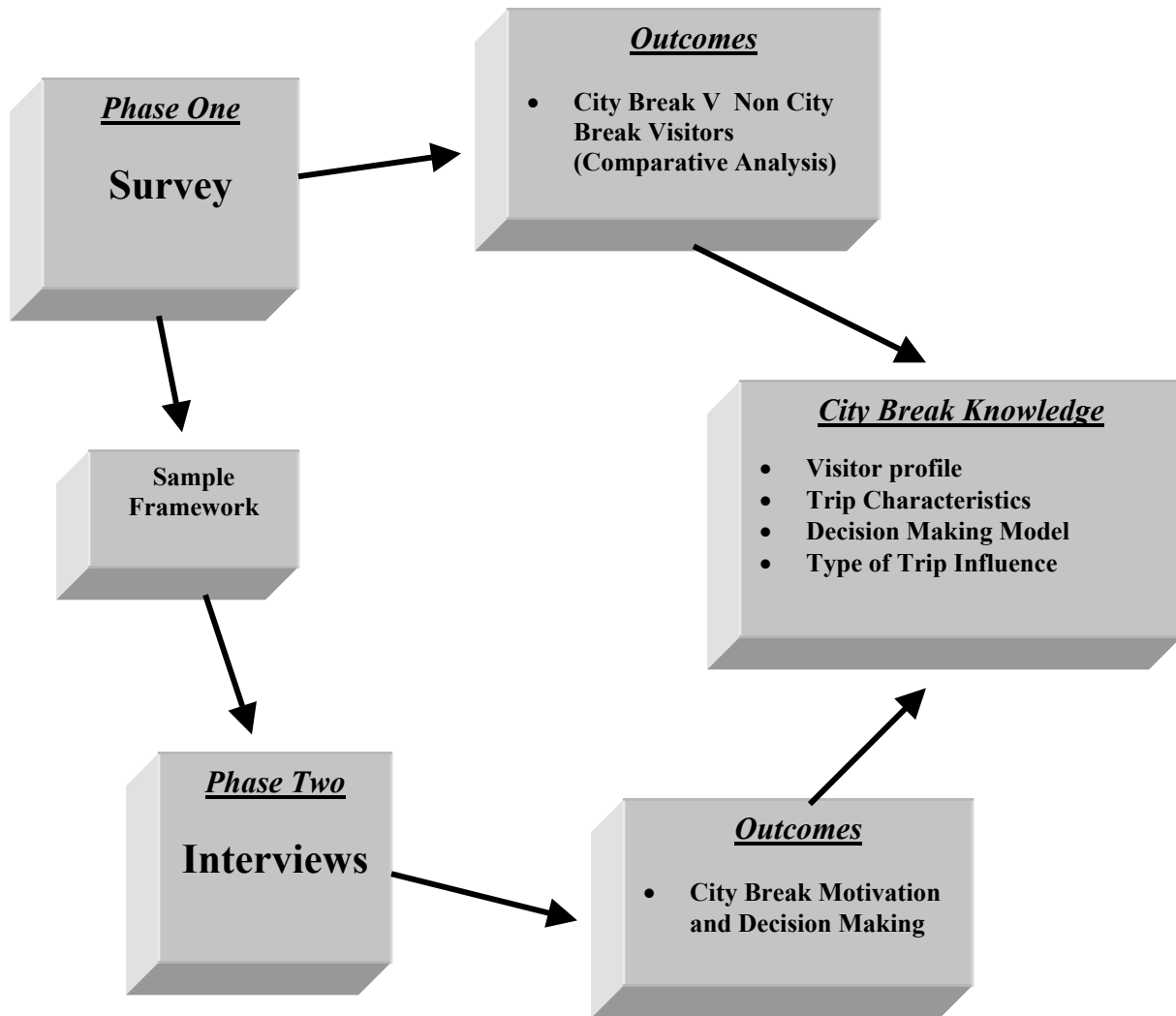
In order to summarise the research approach adopted, Table 4.2 illustrates the main data requirements for each of the research aims. In addition Figure 4.1 presents, in diagrammatic form, the research process framework.



**Table 4.2**  
**Research Aims and Required Data**

<b>Research Aim</b>	<b>Required Data</b>	<b>Type of Data</b>
1. Examine background information on city break travel.	Information about city break trip taking. The nature of its impacts and the reasons for its growth.	Secondary
2. Develop a profile of city break travellers.	Socio-demographic information contrasting city break versus non city break visitors.	Mostly Quantitative with some Qualitative
3. Analyse distinctive characteristics of city break trips.	Information on length of trip, travel party composition, timing of visit, etc.	Quantitative and Qualitative
4. To investigate the motivations and decision-making behaviour of city break holidaymakers.	Information relating to motives and decision making behaviour with comparisons to main holidays.	Mostly Qualitative with some Quantitative
5. To examine type of trip as an influencing factor in the travel decision process.	Information showing relationship between characteristics of a trip and level of involvement.	Mostly Qualitative with some Quantitative

**Figure 4.1**  
**Research Process Framework**



An explanation of each of the two main phases of the research will now be presented in detail. The exact research approach adopted in each phase will be discussed and justified.

## **4.5 Phase One – The Quantitative Study**

### **4.5.1 Objectives of Phase One**

The main purpose of Phase One is to gain a better understanding of the city break travel market. Therefore the following specific objectives were set out;

- To develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists,
- To analyse the distinctiveness of a city break holiday by finding out its principal characteristics and features,
- To provide insights into some of the important aspects of the city break travel decision.

In addition, the quantitative data was intended to reveal some of the key issues that could be probed further in Phase Two.

Questionnaire based surveys are the most commonly used quantitative method in tourism studies (Brunt, 1997, p.25), and are generally regarded as good instruments to collect data that enable the researcher to generalise about a population (Creswell, 1994). Such an instrument was considered a possible option for Phase One, as it would allow relevant and wide ranging data on city break visitors to be collected in large numbers. A survey was therefore carefully explored in terms of its appropriateness in addressing the objectives of Phase One.

## **4.6 The Survey Instrument**

A survey consists of a numeric description of some fraction of the population – the sample – through the data collection process of asking people questions (Fowler, 1988). Pizam (1994, p.100) points out the advantages that questionnaires have over other data collection techniques. These are:

- relatively inexpensive;
- require little skill to administer;
- enable standardisation and uniformity;
- can assure respondent's anonymity;
- can be administered to a large number of respondents simultaneously;
- can be mailed (or emailed), and,
- can eliminate interviewer bias.

In addition, Malhotra & Birks (2000) highlight the fact that the information obtained from questionnaires is reliable because the responses are limited to the alternatives listed and, the generally fixed response style ensures that coding, analysis and interpretation of data are relatively easy. However, the questionnaire method also has its limitations, including; they have a low response rate (particularly mailed questionnaires); they are restricted to verbal behaviour; and they lack control over the research setting (Pizam, 1994, p.100). In addition, Malhotra & Birks (2000) highlight as another significant limitation, respondent's inability or unwillingness to provide the desired information, particularly in relation to personal or sensitive information, or in areas such as motives, beliefs and feelings. Wording questions properly is also a problem with fixed-response questionnaires. "The survey imposes the language and logic of the researcher onto questionnaire respondents" (Malhotra & Birks, 2000, p.210).

Babbie (1990) points out that the purpose of survey research is to generalise from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristic, attitude, or behaviour of this population. Such features of the survey design were seen as central to the requirements of this research. One of the key objectives of Phase One was to accrue comprehensive information on the city break travel market to Dublin. A questionnaire survey was therefore deemed an appropriate research vehicle to achieve this. Its standardised and uncomplicated design, along with its easily administered format, ensured a reliable and accurate picture of the city break travel market could be compiled.

Having made the decision to employ a questionnaire survey, the focus then turned to the type of survey to use. Due to the general and extensive nature of the data required, a wide-ranging ‘visitor survey’ type instrument was needed. Such surveys are commonly used in tourism research particularly by destination marketing organisations. The main areas of information required for this phase of the research included; *visitor profile data*, *trip characteristic data*, and *visitor behaviour data*.

Creswell (1994) mentions three types of survey instruments which researchers commonly use: a self-designed instrument, a modified instrument, and an intact instrument developed by someone else. For the purpose of this research, all three of these options were considered. However due to the researcher’s involvement with an existing visitor survey in Dublin, one of the latter two options seemed most logical.

## **4.7 The Dublin Visitor Survey**

The Dublin Visitor Survey has been carried out in Dublin since 1999. It was originally designed and developed by the Research and Statistics Working Group of the Federation of European City Tourist Offices (FECTO) now known as European Cities Marketing (ECM), a representative group for city tourism organisations around Europe. The ECM survey was designed in an attempt to bring some standardisation to city tourism statistics in a European context. The intention was to provide a common research instrument that member cities could implement, with results being pooled, thus helping to improve the quality of city tourism data and information in Europe. The key objectives of implementing the survey in Dublin were:

- to improve the quality of urban tourism information within a Dublin city and European context;
- to provide a more detailed understanding of the leisure tourism market, and visitor’s perceptions of Dublin, its facilities and services;
- to ultimately provide a comparative analysis of visitor opinion across a range of European cities so as to enable meaningful comparisons to be made;

- to provide those engaged in a wide range of tourism activities within Dublin with the necessary information to make management decisions;
- to establish a database which could be utilised in urban tourism research in the future. This would facilitate the measurement of urban tourism development in Dublin;
- to improve the compatibility and integration of statistics between various European cities.

The survey was adopted in Dublin and was co-ordinated and managed by a small team in the Dublin Institute of Technology (of which this researcher was a member). The survey instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire that covered the following areas: visitor profile, type of holiday/visit, length of stay, type of accommodation used, method of booking (both accommodation and travel), types of information used prior to arrival in the city, types of transport used prior to and on arrival in the city, major influencing factors affecting decision to visit, activities undertaken in the city, and overall rating of Dublin.

The Dublin Visitor Survey is based on a sample of 1000 adults interviewed over a 12 month period. Between 1999 and 2003, almost 5,000 people were interviewed. This has resulted in a wealth of information about visitors to Dublin and afforded an unprecedented insight into their travel behaviour and perceptions of the city.

However, the data relates to all visitors to the city and does not specifically target any subgroup. Therefore, in order to be of relevance to this particular research it was essential to be able to retrieve specific data relating to city break visitors. Thus, it was necessary to decide whether one could modify the existing instrument to extract the required data, or whether it was best to develop a completely new instrument. When a new instrument was considered it was quickly realised that the vast majority of the survey would be replicating the existing Dublin Visitor Survey (DVS). Most of the questions that would be asked to elicit the required information on city break visitors were already present in the DVS. It was therefore decided that modifying the existing survey to suit the specific needs of the study was a more prudent option. Creswell (1994, p.121) points out “when one modifies an instrument or combines instruments in a study, the original validity and reliability may be distorted, and it becomes important to re-establish validity and reliability.” It is important to point out that the original survey was developed by the

European Cities Marketing Research and Statistics Working Group. The instrument was designed to a high standard using recognised survey questioning techniques. All questions were of a closed nature. Some questions used the Likert scale format to elicit the necessary information. The Dublin Visitor Survey was therefore considered suitable and where adjustments were necessary every effort was undertaken to ensure that the validity and reliability of the instrument remained intact. In fact only minor adjustments were needed as the original instrument was so detailed.

The fact that the survey yielded data relating to all types of leisure visitors to the city (and not just city breakers) was seen as a positive, as it allowed for a comparative analysis to be carried out on different visitor types. The chance to compare city break visitors with people visiting the city as part of a wider holiday was seen as being particularly useful. All in all, the Dublin Visitor Survey was considered the most appropriate method to achieve the objectives of the first phase of the research and the decision was made to utilise it.

#### **4.7.1 Survey Modifications**

As mentioned previously, the modifications that were made to the Dublin Visitor Survey were minor. They mostly related to modifying or slightly altering existing questions. These changes are indicated in red on the survey questionnaire in Appendix 4.1. The following highlights the main modifications that were made along with the rationale for each.

##### **Question 4c): *Would you describe it (the trip) as a city break?***

This was included to try and qualify answers in relation to the type of holiday people were on. The original question did not specifically mention the term ‘city break.’

##### **Question 12b): *What activity was most important when deciding to visit Dublin?***

This question was posed after participants had just replied to a question listing a range of activities they had done (or intended to do) in Dublin. It was included to try to focus the respondent on the *most important* activity which influenced them in their decision.

**Question 13: *How much or how little influence did each of the following have on your decision to visit Dublin?***

This question also attempts to elicit information relating to influential factors on the decision to visit Dublin. In the original question, a list of 14 factors are presented to the respondent from which they are asked to rate the influence of each, using a Likert scale. However, in the context of this study it was felt that this list had some obvious omissions, particularly in terms of failing to uncover the influences of cheap transportation to Dublin. This was something that came across strong in the literature review and as such it was decided to probe the issue further in the questionnaire. Therefore the following three factors were added to the list:

- *inexpensive airfare*
- *inexpensive ferry*
- *inexpensive accommodation*

It was felt that these would yield some interesting data in relation to the city break travel decision.

**Question 14: *Please state sources of information you have consulted in relation to this trip?***

This question relates to the information search carried out by visitors. The original question, while managing to draw out significant data relating to this topic, failed to get respondents to specify specific sources, particularly in relation to internet sites and guide books. In addition, it did not distinguish between information sourced before the trip and after arrival. These shortcomings are addressed with the modified question.

**Question 15: *How many times (if any) have you visited Dublin over the past 10 years?***

This was a new question and was asked to try and uncover loyalty patterns and experience levels.

The above constitutes the main alterations made to the existing survey instrument and in each case, a conscious effort was made to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument remained intact. This meant preserving the style and structure of each question where possible and ensuring the logical flow of the questioning was not hindered.



#### **4.7.2 Questionnaire Sampling Process**

Once the decision was made to opt for a survey instrument the attention then turned to the issue of sampling and sample design. Sampling describes the activity of selecting a few from the total, and starts with defining the population. The target population essentially consists of the collection of elements or objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made (Malhotra & Birks, 2000). In the case of this research, adult city break visitors to Dublin represent the main target population. However, because of the intention to compare city break visitors with non city break holidaymakers, it was necessary to have a wider definition of the initial target population; namely all adult leisure visitors to Dublin. Thus, no change to the existing sampling frame for the Dublin Visitor Survey was needed. The sample therefore consisted of 1,000 overseas visitors to Dublin, intercepted over a twelve-month period in 2003. Such a sample count was regarded as sufficiently large for the purpose of the research. The sample only included overseas visitors - domestic travellers were excluded. In addition, the sample was weighted to reflect the known numbers of different nationalities visiting Dublin (based on Failte Ireland statistics), and was carried out at seven locations throughout the city centre.

#### **4.7.3 Survey Site Selection**

Careful selection of the interview locations is critical to the success of any survey in generating a representative sample of visitors. Mindful of this, and conscious of trying to limit bias, significant attention was given to site selection, with a large initial list of options being carefully whittled down to just seven. The locations eventually chosen consisted of sites that were geographically spread around the city and included a variety of tourist attractions, entertainment venues, and areas where tourists tended to concentrate.

#### **4.7.4 Identifying the City Break Visitor**

In order to address the objectives of Phase One, it was necessary to isolate city break respondents from the overall survey data. The city break visitor cohort was extracted by selecting those respondents who gave the following two answers;

- they were away from home on holiday, and

- Dublin city was their only destination on the trip.

Thus, city break visitors consisted of people travelling to Dublin only, and for leisure only. In addition, as ‘commercial’ city breakers were the main target of the enquiry, those visiting friends and relatives were not included.

This resulted in a subset that consisted of 379 respondents. By running various cross tabulations it was possible to amass a large quantity of information on this particular visitor market. However, in order to examine these city breakers in a more meaningful way, it was decided to conduct a comparative analysis with another visitor group. Only by doing this could the distinctiveness of the city break market be fully observed. At first, comparing city breakers with those people who described their trip to Dublin as their main holiday was considered. However, it was soon realised that these two visitor groupings were not mutually exclusive. In other words, for some people the city break to Dublin was also their main holiday. It was decided therefore to compare city breakers with people who had stated they were visiting Dublin on holiday but as part of a wider trip that included other locations. This group was labelled *Non City Break Holidaymakers* and numbered 416 respondents. As this group comprised mostly (although not exclusively) people on long, primary holidays, it was felt they would act as an interesting point of comparison, and help in establishing the distinctiveness (or not) of the city break visitor segment.

#### **4.7.5 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Having identified and separated both city break visitors and non city break holidaymakers, it was possible to run comparisons under various headings. In order to measure the strength of the association between the type of visitor and a range of variables relating to their trip it was decided to use chi-square tests. Chi-square examines whether or not the frequency distribution for a particular data set is similar to or significantly different from that expected by chance or some predetermined pattern (Clarke et al. 1998). It is used to test the statistical significance of the observed association in a cross tabulation and therefore “assists in determining whether a systematic association exists between the two variables,” (Malhotra & Birks, 2000, p.469).

Although not as powerful as parametric tests, chi-square is particularly valuable as it is relatively easy to apply and the data can be of any level (Clark et al., 1998, p.219). Chi-square is widely used in research studies and was deemed suitable for the requirements of the quantitative data analysis of Phase One.

Both visitor groups were examined and tested across a wide range of variables. In keeping with the objectives of Phase One, features relating to visitor profile, trip characteristics and the travel decision were particularly scrutinised. This comparative analysis approach proved very useful and a number of distinctive characteristics and behaviour patterns in the city break market were identified. These are presented in full in Chapter 5, along with other findings from the Dublin Visitor Survey.

In addition, the sequential aspect of the research meant a number of the findings were used in developing a sampling frame for Phase Two. This involved closely analysing the visitor profile data that emerged from the city break cohort. Of particular interest were findings in relation to; *visitor origin, age profile, activities engaged in and, time of visit.*

Having explained the objectives and approach followed in Phase One of the research, Phase Two will now be discussed. This represents the principal focus of the study; the motivation and decision making of city break travellers.

## **4.8 Phase Two - The Qualitative Study**

### **4.8.1 An Exploratory Approach**

Phase Two of the research is exploratory in nature. According to Malhotra & Birks (2000, p.78), with exploratory research the emphasis is on exploring or searching through a problem or phenomenon to provide insights and understanding. They discuss a number of circumstances where the use of exploratory research is particularly appropriate. Two of these circumstances are especially relevant in the context of this study. These are:

- ❖ To identify relevant or salient behaviour patterns, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations, etc. and to develop structures of these constructs.
- ❖ To explore the reasons that lie behind the statistical differences between groups that may emerge from secondary data or surveys.

These two scenarios have particular significance to Phase Two, which is focused on exploring very similar circumstances in a city break context. The full emphasis of Phase Two is outlined in the following objectives:

- To explore the motivations involved in taking a city break trip.
- To examine the decision making process undertaken by travellers when purchasing a city break holiday.
- To investigate the relationship between type of visit and decision making behaviour.

It was decided that the best way to achieve these objectives was through a qualitative research approach. An increasing number of consumer research problems are being investigated using such means. This is particularly the case where, as Teare (1994, p.40) points out:

*...the gathering of information... is too subtle and too complex to be tailored to the structured, standardised techniques and criteria of quantitative research.*

Riley (1996) observes that the majority of tourism marketing research has relied on structured surveys and quantification, and although these approaches have provided the benefits of objectivity, he notes, the findings have been largely limited to predictions of a macro tendency. This dependence has limited researchers from getting to know their subjects beyond their survey responses. Moreover, Havitz (1994) asserts that the usage of questioning techniques such as the five point Likert Scale has minimal effectiveness when capturing the essence of a touristic experience.

Decrop (1999b) describes the increasing usage of qualitative research designs for studying tourist behaviour and highlights a number of studies which have used qualitative methods. These

include Teare's 1994 longitudinal study over three years investigating consumer decision making in the hotel leisure market, using the grounded-theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967). This approach was also adopted by Riley (1995) when he examined 'prestigious travel' behaviour. Other themes tackled using qualitative methods include; customer choice decisions (Woodside and McDonald, 1994); destination images (Dann, 1996; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; McCay and Fesenmaier, 1997), motivation (Milman, 1993), travel choices (Corey, 1996), tourist satisfaction (Marti, 1995), and tourist consumption experiences (Hartman, 1998; Markwell, 1997).

## **4.9 Qualitative Approach for Researching the Travel Decision**

The use of qualitative methods to research buying decisions is of particular interest to this study. As with most consumer buying decisions, the leisure traveller collects and evaluates information, eventually decides and acts upon a set of complex and multiple travel decisions, and evaluates the satisfaction of individual experiences and overall set of events. Such an involved process can be extremely difficult to examine using standard quantitative methods. Teare (1994, p.38) suggests that:

*...comprehensive models of consumer decision making are often too complex and/or too generalized to test empirically, indicating that an alternative approach, located much closer to observable consumer behaviour, is needed.*

Woodside and King (2001) concur and point out the usage of qualitative research techniques in developing their own travel decision-making model - the purchase consumption system (PCS). Likewise, Peterson (1994, p.489) advocates the use of qualitative methods to better understand the travel buying decision, and in particular she supports the usage of individual interviews, which she says are:

*...particularly useful in travel research when the goal is to understand, for example, how travellers go about making a decision to take one vacation trip versus another. To gather that information it is necessary to delve into each person's decision process at length - to learn where the idea originated, what information was gathered, who was consulted, whose views were sought out, and finally, what led the individual to make a choice for one opportunity and to reject the others.*

Similarly, with the study of motivation and in particular travel motives, a qualitative approach is increasingly seen as an appropriate method of unearthing accurate information in relation to reasons for travel. Krippendorf (1987) points out that generally there are problems with studies asking a tourist what their reasons or motives for travel are – partly due to the multi motivational nature of much trip taking and also because the reasons given may not reflect the true underlying motives for the travel. He suggests that many things remain hidden in the subconscious and cannot be brought to light by simple questions. The need to get deeper is also highlighted by Jamrozny and Uysal (1994, p.138) who point out:

*...people give several reasons why they travel: in general, to see different places, to visit friends and relatives, to get away from the daily routine, to relax and enjoy, for sports and educational purposes. But for the researcher exploring people's behaviour, these answers do not reveal deeper causes of why, specifically, people want to see the world, get away from it all, or fly thousands of miles to lie out in the sun.*

In addition, Mannell & Iso-Ahola (1987) point out limitations with regards to factor analytic studies in tourist and leisure motivation. Many studies consist of a situation where respondents are presented with a large number of reasons and then asked to rate the importance of each reason for their tourist participation. These ratings, however, have been done as general statements rather than in relation to specific touristic experiences. As a result the authors believe many important research questions remain unanswered. Similarly Middleton (1994) points out that such lists are not motivations for individuals in the sense that psychologists and behavioural marketers would understand them; motivations must be related to needs and personal goals.

Within any group of travellers who state that they are seeking the same benefits from their holiday (e.g. to rest and relax), detailed probing usually uncovers another level of motivation. Some individuals who travel to rest and relax, for example, state that they do so in order to escape the routine and predictability of their day-to-day lives. Others travelling to rest and relax are rewarding themselves by maximising their enjoyment of all that life has to offer (Fodness, 1994). Likewise, Klenosky (2002) points out that with regard to motivational pull factors, people may have multiple and possibly very different reasons for valuing the same destination attribute.

For example, beaches may be important to a respondent because they afford opportunities for water-based recreation, getting a tan, and socialising with others.

In relation to urban tourism motives specifically, Page (2002, p.135) criticises the failure of many city surveys to provide in-depth insight on their visitors:

*...even where cities are beginning to recognise the importance of monitoring visitor perceptions and satisfaction and the activity patterns and behaviours of tourists, all too often the surveys have been superficial, naïve and devoid of any real understanding of urban tourism.*

The studies of Crompton (1979) and Pearce & Caltabiano (1983) both used unstructured interviews to collect qualitative data on tourist's travel motivations. In each case the data was analysed for insights into the underlying reasons for travel. Crompton (1979, p.415) for example, found that push or socio-psychological motives were rarely overtly identified by respondents in early discussions but:

*...as the interview proceeded it often became apparent that while initial concern and effort had been with selecting a vacation destination, the value, benefits and satisfaction derived from the vacation were neither related to, nor derived from, a particular destination's attributes.... In effect, these motives represented a hidden agenda*

Fodness (1994) used focus group interviews to explore the reasons individuals travel in an attempt to develop rather than test hypotheses. Such examples are evidence of a growing belief that motivations, particularly travel motivations, are best understood and investigated using qualitative methods of inquiry. Travel motives, and indeed, travel decisions, represent a significant challenge for tourism researchers, particularly if they want to go beyond the obvious answers that are commonly cited in survey based studies. In order to uncover the real experiences that lie behind travel motives and travel decisions it is necessary to employ data gathering techniques that will provide a more detailed view of the traveler's trip taking behaviour. Thus, for the purpose of this research it was deemed useful and appropriate to use a commonly employed qualitative technique, the in-depth interview.

In addition, in order to provide more depth to the research it was decided to use Dublin city as a case study in which to carry out the interviewing process. The justification for using a case study approach will first be explained.

#### **4.10 Case Study Approach**

Before examining the interviewing process undertaken in Phase Two, it is important to explain the decision to use Dublin city as the main focal point for investigating the city break phenomenon. The case study approach was selected because it was perceived to be the most appropriate to address the research objectives. According to Berg (2004), the case study method involves systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions. Similarly, Patton (1990) points out that case studies have become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information – “rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from exemplars of the phenomenon in question.” The case study is not actually a data-gathering technique but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data-gathering measures (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1998). Extremely rich, detailed and in-depth information characterise the type of data gathered in a case study. As Berg (2004, p.251) explains:

*...by concentrating on a single phenomenon, individual, community, or institution, the researcher aims to uncover the manifest interaction of significant factors characteristic of this phenomenon, individual, community, or institution.*

Similarly, Johns & Lee-Ross (1998) describe case study research as a *focusing* approach. As it progresses it examines an ever smaller portion of the research situation (the case) in ever greater depth and detail. Thus, case study research is especially useful where areas of perceived complexity exist. This is of particular relevance to this research where significant challenges were perceived in relation to uncovering information on the complex area of travel motives and decision making behaviour. The case study approach was seen as an appropriate technique to use as it allows multiple sources of information to be employed and aims to view a research situation



from as many sides as possible in order to build up a rich data picture about it. As Yin (1989, p.23) usefully describes it:

*An empirical enquiry that ... investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The approach attempts to explain causal links in real-life that are too complex for surveys or experimental strategies, in situations where a description of the real-life context is necessary.*

This “real life context” that Yin describes is a crucial point for researchers in travel and tourism. The decision making process involved in taking a city break holiday is heavily influenced by the context in which it takes place. The situations and circumstances that people find themselves in at particular times can be central to the way they behave in terms of their motivations and decision making. Thus, it becomes crucial to uncover what Flyvbjerg (2004, p.421) refers to as “context-dependent knowledge,” if one is to truly understand the phenomenon under study. And the best way to do this, he believes, is through the case study approach, “such knowledge and expertise ...lie at the centre of the case study as a research and teaching method.” Having decided on the appropriateness of the case study as a methodological tool, the next question related to the type of case study approach to take.

For the purpose of achieving the research objectives a number of options were considered. Using Dublin city as the main focus of the study was an obvious consideration. It was very ‘feasible’ as a case study site for the examination of the city break phenomenon. However, similarly attractive was the option of a multi-site approach, where a number of cities (including Dublin) could be used, thus providing a more generalised view of the phenomenon. In the end a Dublin only approach was chosen. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it was felt that a multi city approach would not have achieved the depth of examination that was necessary to understand the phenomenon. It would have involved spreading resources too thin and resulted in a study that lacked rigor because it failed to devote intensive and prolonged care to examining the details of each site. Although sacrificing some of the generalisability that can be offered by a multi-case approach, the decision to focus on Dublin does provide compensation in terms of depth. As Schofield (1989, p.213) points out:

*...attempts to gain generalisability through studying large numbers of sites undercut the depth of understanding of individual sites, which is the hallmark of the qualitative approach as it has come to be understood.*

The advantages to the Dublin only approach were considerable, but principal among them was the complementary fit between the Dublin Visitor Survey and the depth interviews. In addition local knowledge and contacts meant accessibility to information and potential sites was relatively easy. All this provided an environment that facilitated a thorough and in-depth analysis of the city break decision to visit Dublin, therefore providing richer and potentially more valid interpretations.

#### **4.10.1 In-depth Interviews**

According to Berg (2004), interviewing can generally be defined as a conversation with a purpose - the main purpose being to gather information on a specific topic. It is intended that through such conversations a greater understanding of the topic will emerge. As Rapley (2004, p.16) describes:

*Interviews are, by their very nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) **accounts** or **versions** of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts.*

Obtaining these ‘accounts’ or ‘versions’ is central to good interviewing. They provide the depth of understanding that is required to fully comprehend the topic under examination. This is particularly true when the topic is a complex or abstract one. For example, Becker (1963) suggests that if the researcher is interested in finding out how frequently a subject smokes marijuana, then it may be quite effective to use a questionnaire survey. If, however, the researcher is interested in the sensation of marijuana smoking (the emotion-laden sensory experience as perceived by the subject), a more effective means of uncovering this information might be an open-ended interview question (Mutchnick & Berg, 1996).

In-depth interviewing was chosen for Phase Two of this research because it provides a data gathering tool which enables a ‘focusing’ of the research effort to take place. It allows the researcher the freedom to probe the topic of city break decision making to such an extent that

real insights can emerge. This is crucial as the travel decision, along with its underlying motives, is one of the most complex and misunderstood topics in tourism research. It consists of both psychological (internal variables) and non-psychological (external variables) and in many cases people remain largely unconscious of their decision-making behaviour. As Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) point out, decision-making researchers face the problem of measuring and understanding a process that is unobservable and for which consumers are only partially aware themselves. In addition, when one focuses specifically on the city break travel decision we find not only a complex phenomenon but one which has received little or no attention at all from research academics. Most of the assumptions that are made about the city break travel decision have come from anecdotal rather than empirical evidence. It is an area that is clearly in need of research, particularly research of a deepening and exploratory nature, given the neglect of the subject. It is the intention of this research to provide insights from “thick descriptions” in the travellers’ own words about their decision processes. These thick descriptions, as outlined by Geertz (1973), consist of detailed information about the process being examined from the viewpoints of the participants in the process.

In-depth interviewing was chosen as the most appropriate field method to obtain this detailed information. This method of data gathering is widely used in qualitative tourism research, particularly in relation to buying behaviour. Woodward et al. (1988, p.103) suggest that interviews provide far greater scope for subjects to explain their own perceptions and decision-making processes than quantitative techniques. Woodside and King (2001) used the long interview method to conduct an exploratory study of tourists’ decision processes when visiting Hawaii.

In his study of Belgian travellers’ decision making processes Decrop (1999b, p.347) used the semi-structured interview technique because he wanted the informants to speak spontaneously and unrestrainedly. Similarly Hartmann (1988) found in his study of North American tourists to Germany that interviews proved very fruitful, and that interviewees were able to communicate the details of their European trips without great difficulty. In a combined methods approach similar to this research, Schott (2002) used depth interviews with young holidaymakers to complement a previously administered questionnaire survey. The interviews were used to probe

and investigate issues of particular interest, complexity, and sensitivity. In addition they helped as an indicative and exploratory tool in explaining some ambiguous issues arising from the questionnaire survey.

#### **4.10.2 Interview Design**

Having decided that in-depth interviewing was the most appropriate way to obtain the detailed information required from the qualitative phase of the research, it then became necessary to determine the specifics of the interview design. This included deciding on what type of interview technique to use, who to interview, where to conduct the interviews, and what questions to use. At the outset it was important to keep in mind the information that was required and the limitations that confronted the researcher in terms of being able to access it.

The semi-structured interview method was chosen as the most suitable for this part of the research, mainly because it allowed for a large range of issues to be addressed (which was crucial given the complexity of the topic), while not compromising on the ability to probe issues of particular importance to the research. The semi-structured interview technique provided a degree of structure to the questioning which was useful when comparing the responses of different interviewees while at the same time allowing the flexibility to digress and follow lines of enquiry that could provide new insights on the topic.

#### **4.10.3 Interview Sampling Process**

The next issue that needed to be addressed was ‘who’ to interview. The focus therefore turned to the task of developing an appropriate sampling frame. Although in qualitative studies smaller samples, which attempt to provide depth rather than breadth, are the norm, it is still deemed to be important that they are representative and reflect the composition of the population under study. Decrop (1999b) points out that sampling in qualitative research is not only about people but may also pertain to type of behaviour, events, and processes (see Table 4.3). This was certainly an important factor in this research as the people chosen to interview had to be engaged in certain behaviour (on a city break), and be going through or have gone through certain processes (decision making).

**Table 4.3**  
**Levels of Analytical Interest in Qualitative Research**

Social Subject	Social Object
Individuals	Specific acts and behaviours (what people do or say)
Roles	Events (marked-off happenings)
Relationships	Activities (regularly occurring sets of behaviour)
Groups (family, social class, culture...)	Strategies (activities aimed toward some goal)
Settings (places or locales within sites)	Meanings, perspectives (how people construe events)
Sites as whole	States (general conditions) Process (ongoing flows, changes over time)

*Source:* Decrop (1999b) adapted from Miles and Huberman (1984).

In addition, in qualitative studies, sampling is not a question of the number of people in the sample, but rather of the ‘richness of information’. As Decrop (1999b, p.343) states “the qualitative researcher strives to record events, and behaviour that are relevant to the concept or theory being studied.” Therefore choosing the right type of people rather than the right number of people became the main priority in this phase.

In order to achieve this, it was necessary to be familiar with the composition of the population under examination (i.e. city breakers). This is where some of the quantitative results from Phase One were utilised. Certain characteristics of city break visitors were used to develop a sampling profile. The characteristics that were of particular interest in this context were, nationality, age, transport and accommodation usage, timing of trip, and sites visited. With this information it was possible to select a sample that was representative of the city break traveller market, as opposed to a group that represented urban tourists in general.

It should also be pointed out that the idea of conducting a second set of interviews with a separate sample of ‘main holiday’ visitors was also considered. This emanated from the desire to examine differences in decision making behaviour between people’s city break trips and their main holidays. However, in the end, it was felt that data in relation to this topic could be best obtained by conducting just one (city break) sample. By asking city breakers a number of additional questions in relation to their previous main holiday, it would be possible to elicit data concerning both types of holidays. Such a single sample approach was deemed to be more useful for a number of reasons.

Firstly, because each individual respondent was asked about their decision making in relation to both types of holidays there was a direct link or fit between the elicited data - thus allowing more meaningful comparisons to be made.

Secondly, conducting a separate sample for main holiday purposes would, to some extent, have deflected the research from its city break focus. It was important to keep the research design tight enough to ensure the main purpose of the study was not lost sight of.

Finally, the issue of logistics was also a factor in deciding against a second sample. The investment resources (time, financial, etc.) needed to conduct a second set of interviews was significant and would have resulted in the spreading of resources too thinly to be justified – particularly when the single sample approach could produce data which was of equal if not better value to the research. In the end therefore it was decided to stick with a single sample of city break visitors and as part of the interview process respondents would be asked a few key questions in relation to their previous main holiday. It was felt that this would allow direct comparisons that would be credible and valuable. Examining main holiday decision making was seen as a secondary objective – one which complemented rather than competed with the main purpose of the research which was to explore city break decision behaviour. Finally, useful direct comparisons could be made because the same people were asked about both types of holidays. In addition, the carrying out of a separate sample of interviews for main holiday

visitors would have deflected attention (as well as resources) from the main focus of the study - city breakers.

#### ***4.10.3.1 Sample Size***

It was felt that a sample of between 30 and 40 would be sufficient to provide the insights and the detailed information that was required to achieve the aims of the qualitative phase. As Patton (1990, p.184) points out, there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research. Sample size depends on the purpose of the inquiry, what you want to find out, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done within available time and resources. Lincoln & Guba (1985) indicate a sample size is sufficient when no new information is uncovered by adding additional cases. In this research it was felt such a situation was reached after 40 city break visitors were interviewed. At that point no new significant insights were emerging from the discussions and the decision to terminate was made.

The interviews were tape recorded, with the consent of the participants, who were each offered a copy of the resultant transcript. In addition, field notes were taken during the conversations and overall impressions and observations were recorded at the end of each interview. In many cases participants were accompanied during the interview by a partner or a travel companion. In general, this was seen as a positive scenario, as the accompanying person was sometimes able to point out facts or clarify points that the interviewee did not know or had forgotten. In cases where the travel decision was a joint one, this was seen as particularly beneficial.

#### ***4.10.4 Site Selection***

This research used Dublin city as the overall site in which the phenomenon of city break holidaying was examined. Miles & Huberman (1984, p.28) point out a site, or a case, is defined as "a bounded context in which one is studying events, processes and outcomes." Thus, the city of Dublin provided the specific setting in which the city break decision making process, along with its underlying motivations, could be examined.

However a major issue still existed in relation to the specific environment or site locations where the individual interviews would take place. Given the spatial and temporal nature of travel

decision-making, two main options presented themselves as possibilities. These were as follows: firstly, to conduct the interviews in Dublin, while the city break visitors were on their trip - and secondly, to carry out the interviews in the respondent's home environment after they had returned from their city break.

Having considered the merits and demerits of each option, it was decided to conduct the interviews in Dublin, while the city break visitors were on their trip. It was felt that this option provided the best opportunity in terms of accessibility, as city break visitors were relatively easy to identify and meet while in Dublin. In addition it was felt that the decision to come to Dublin would still be relatively fresh in their minds. Also, conducting the interviews in Dublin presented a much easier scenario in terms of the logistics of organising and getting access to the interview sites.

The next decision to be made concerned the specific Dublin locations where the interviews would be conducted. It was decided to use three sites, each of which was quite different. The main reason for this was to try to limit any bias that one particular site might be prone to. The three sites where the interviews were conducted were, the Guinness Storehouse, Jurys Inn Hotel, and Dublin Airport.

The Guinness Storehouse was chosen for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Dublin Visitor Survey results show that the vast majority of city break travellers visit tourist attractions during their trip to Dublin. With the Guinness Storehouse being the number one tourist attraction in the city it seemed an obvious location as an interview site. In addition, the researcher had a number of contacts within the attraction which proved very useful in terms of gaining access to the visitors and being provided with an appropriate interviewing environment. Visitor attractions are often used by tourism researchers as sites for conducting interviews (see, Couldry, 1998; Nickerson et al., 2003). Indeed, in their study of methodologies employed to examine visitor experiences at destinations, Nickerson et al (2004) compared three data gathering approaches: diary, open-ended mail back survey and in-depth interviews carried out at visitor attractions. They found that the in-depth interviews at visitor attractions proved the best method to elicit deeper explanations behind the meanings of visitors' experiences.



Jurys Inn Hotel was selected as it represented an accommodation type that, according to the results of the Dublin Visitor Survey, was typically used by city break visitors. The hotel was very accommodating and allowed a note to be placed in the rooms requesting participation in the interviews by city break guests (see Appendix 4.2). This proved a lot more productive and convenient than trying to solicit participants ‘cold,’ in the hotel lobby. In addition, the hotel kindly provided a small conference room in which the interviews could be carried out.

Dublin airport was chosen as the third interview location, mainly to provide a contrast to the others. It represented a transport terminal, which, the Dublin Visitor Survey results showed, is utilised by the overwhelming majority of city break visitors to the city. Exit interviews carried out at airports are generally seen as a good way of getting an overall picture of the traveller’s perceptions and experiences of their holiday as they come at the end of the trip. In their qualitative examination of the complexity of travellers’ decision-making, Woodside & King (2001, p.13) carried out 68 exit interviews in the waiting areas of the two major Hawaii Island airports. These interviews provided rich data “in the travellers’ own words about their decision processes and about their interactive decision-making for trip choices.” Similarly, Dublin airport provided a good location for conducting interviews with returning city break visitors. The researcher obtained airside clearance over a two-week period that allowed interviewing to be carried out in the waiting lounges at the terminal gates. By monitoring the departure schedule it was possible to strategically pick the most relevant flights for sampling purposes. Generally arriving in the waiting area 60 to 80 minutes before the flight was due to depart, it was usually possible to identify and select an appropriate interviewee within minutes.

All interviews were carried out using a semi-structured format. Berg (2004) points out that the interview format is determined by the kinds of questions you want to pose and the sorts of answers you expect to receive. It was important therefore to carefully consider which questions to ask and how to ask them. In order to provide some direction in this regard it was decided to develop a conceptual framework that would guide the field work and act as a point of reference in terms of the questioning style and sequence.

#### **4.10.5 Conceptual Framework**

The common perception of qualitative research is that it involves the minimum pre-structured designs. Grounded theorists for example believe in a very ‘loose’, highly inductive approach, which allows the researcher to capture the full complexity of social phenomena. On the other hand, Miles & Hubberman (1994, p.17) point out that qualitative studies can also be entirely “confirmatory”- that is, can seek to test or further explicate a conceptualisation. They conclude:

*...as researchers, we do have background. We see and decipher details, complexities, and subtleties that would elude a less knowledgeable observer. We know some questions to ask, which incidents to attend to closely, and how our theoretical interests are embodied in the field. Not to “lead” with your conceptual strength can be simply self-defeating.*

Similarly Wolcott (1982, p.157) suggests that although there is great merit in being open-minded and entering research settings looking for questions as well as answers, one cannot “embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and (it is) foolish not to make that quest explicit.” Miles & Huberman (1994, p.18) point out that focusing and bounding the research study is an important activity that should be carried out before entering the ‘field’. They recommend the development of a conceptual framework that will help direct the researcher in the quest for relevant data:

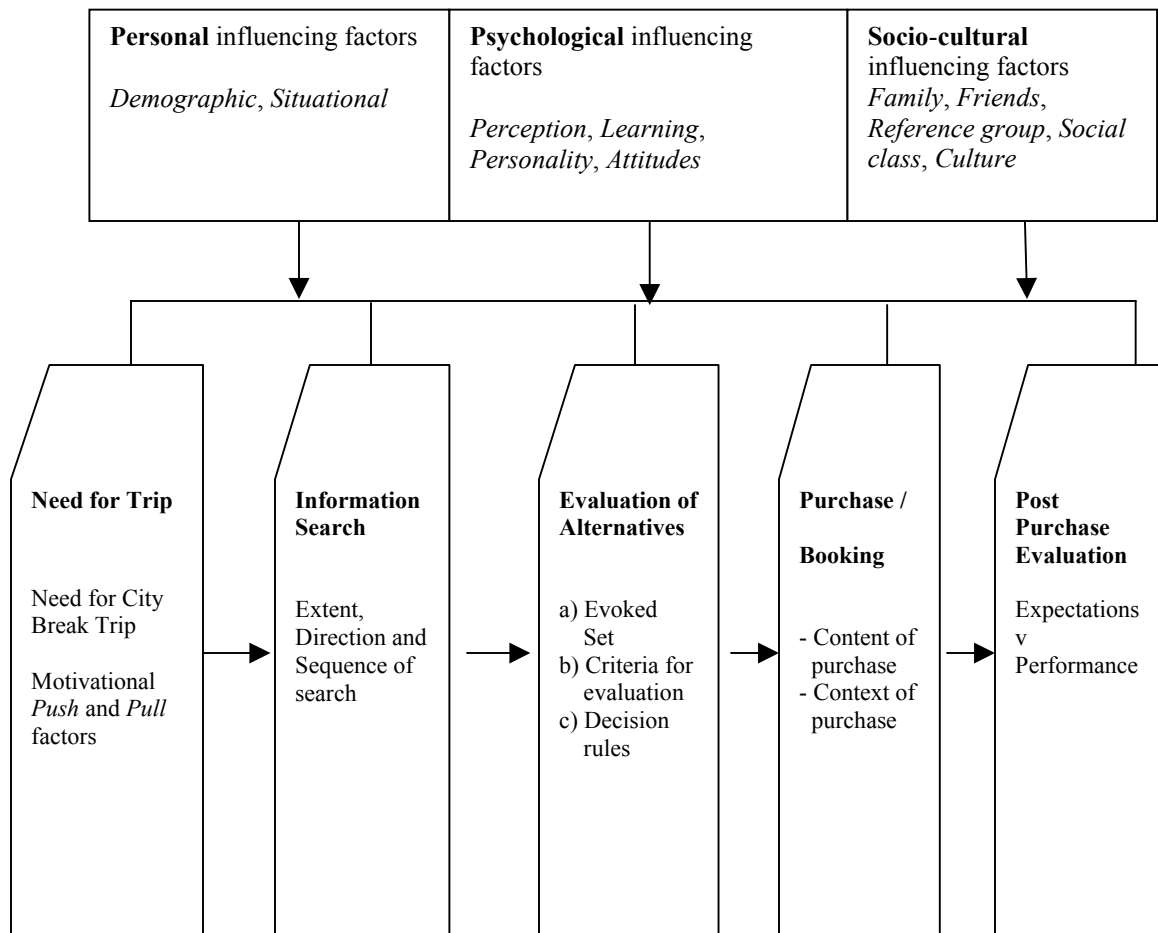
*A conceptual framework explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied - the key factors, constructs or variables-and the presumed relationships among them. Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal.*

Developing a conceptual framework can be very beneficial to the researcher as it forces him/her to be selective - to decide which variables are most important, which relationships are likely to be most meaningful, and, as a consequence, what information needs to be collected and analysed – at least at the outset. Finn et al. (2000, p.22) strongly advise tourism researchers to:

*...seek out a guiding framework at the conceptual or theoretical level (which will)...help make sense of the data whether it is through the testing of hypotheses derived from theory or the search for patterns grounded in theory.*

For the purpose of this study a conceptual framework was developed which reflected the main stages of the tourist decision-making process (see Figure 4.2). The framework represents the researcher's adaptation of well established decision making models in the tourism literature. Its intention was to provide a focus for the field research by indicating the key areas to elicit information. It was deliberately uncomplicated to allow new ideas and concepts to emerge. The framework consists of a logical flow in the tourist decision making process with each stage (represented by the vertical rectangular boxes) being the focus of enquiry for the study. The framework largely consists of recognised stages in the decision making process, each of which has already been identified and examined in the literature review. These stages have been adapted to reflect the specific areas of enquiry necessary for examining the decision to take a city break. In addition the framework shows three main areas of influence (the horizontal rectangular boxes) commonly associated with the tourism decision. Again these were explored and probed with the intention of highlighting their relevance to the city break decision. Although this approach represents entering the field with a predetermined model, it does not mean that the researcher is setting out to test it, as one would in a quantitative study. Rather it can be seen as, what Creswell (1994, p.97) terms, "a *tentative* conceptual framework." This means that rather than being *tested* during the course of the research, the model is instead *modified* as a result of it. Thus the framework represents a decision model that can be used as a point of reference in terms of comparing the city break decision. Initially however the main purpose of the framework was to act as a blueprint for the study where the degree of *bounding* and *focusing* was clearly outlined. To this end it provided direction in terms of the interview questioning. However the specific ordering (sequencing), phrasing, adherence to subject matter, and general style of questions still had to be decided on.

**Figure 4.2**  
**Conceptual Framework for a ‘City Break Decision-Making’ Field Study**



#### **4.10.6 Interview Structure and Question Design**

In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or phenomena under examination, one has to pay careful attention to question design. Berg (2004) puts forward four types or styles of questions that should be included in the data-gathering instrument. These are: throw away questions, essential questions, extra questions, and probing questions. The *throw away questions* are the ones used to develop rapport with the interviewee and/or gain some basic demographic information. The *essential questions* concern the central focus of the study, eliciting specific desired information. *Extra questions* are ones that are included in order to check on the reliability of responses or to measure the possible influence a change of wording might have. Finally, *probing questions* are the ones which provide interviewers with a way to draw out

more complete stories from interviewees. They are often used to ask subjects to elaborate on answers they have already made to other questions. All of these types of questions were used by the researcher in this study. The throw away questions were used throughout the interviews (although mostly at the start) to try and establish a rapport with the interviewee and set them at ease. The essential and extra questions mainly centred on the core stages in the decision process. At each of these stages probing questions were used to sketch a fuller picture of city break decision making as experienced by each respondent (see interview guideline in Appendix 4.3).

Each interview started with some general questions such as where the respondents were from, how long they were staying and who they had travelled with. Although this information was useful, and indeed in some cases necessary for the study, it was elicited in a very informal and casual way. These throw away questions proved invaluable in drawing out a complete story from respondents. The bulk of the interviews however consisted of five main sections. These correspond to the stages in the decision making process. It was felt that the most appropriate way to question respondents about their trip was in a sequence that fitted in with the decision making process. However, it should be pointed out that this sequencing was purely for guidance purposes. Whenever it was found that respondent's decision making did not follow such a pattern, the questioning was altered in order to explore and probe any differences.

Section one deals with the need and motivation for taking the trip. This was a crucial part of the interview as it related to information that was central to the main objectives of the study. It was important therefore to ask the right questions. In relation to travel needs, it was decided to follow a hierarchical line of questioning as outlined by Hodgson (1983) that reflected peoples need to take a trip. Thus, the questioning started with the initial decision of whether or not to take a trip. In some cases this lead to further information about the interviewee's trip taking patterns. Next the circumstances in relation to the type of trip chosen (i.e. a city break) were explored. Of particular interest here was to what extent the type or nature of the trip was important to the interviewee. Once these initial questions were answered the focus turned to what Hodgson refers to as third order questions, such as where to go, what type of accommodation to use, and with which tour operator to book. In terms of uncovering the underlying motives for taking the trip, the questioning was designed to facilitate the probing of push and pull factors wherever possible.

Motivational push forces are the needs and desires within the visitors which activate (push) them to take a trip, while pull factors tend to be the attributes of the destination which lead an individual to select one place over another. In order to draw out interviewees on their underlying motives a laddering approach was used where possible. This involved guiding the respondent along a “ladder of abstraction”, uncovering the links between the relatively concrete attributes of a product, the more abstract benefits those attributes provide, and the highly abstract personal values important to the consumer (Klenosky, Gengler & Mulvey, 1993).

Section two of the interview dealt with the information search stage of the travel decision. The focus here was the process of information gathering which visitors undertook to help them to make decisions relating to their trip. Many visitor decisions are based on a combination of past experience (internal sources) and marketing and non-commercial information (external sources). Of particular interest for this research was the extent, direction and sequence of the search. The extent of the search related to the amount of time, effort and intensity that was applied to the quest for information. The direction referred to the actual sources that were consulted or called upon in the collection of information. These can be classified in terms of whether the source was commercial or non-commercial and received from personal or non personal sources. The sequence of the search related to the order in which the different sources of information were consulted. This was investigated in order to explore the possibility that city break travellers might follow a particular pattern of information searching behaviour.

Section three of the interviews covered the evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision process. Of particular importance here was uncovering two main types of information:

- (a) An insight into the brands or alternatives which they considered as possibilities for satisfying their travel needs and from which they planned to make their selection (the evoked set), and
- (b) The criteria they used to evaluate these brands.

In addition, it was hoped to reveal the types of decision rules that were employed by respondents when making their selections. This information was sought not just in relation to their choice of city (Dublin), but also for the individual products they had selected e.g. transport, accommodation or package tour.

The fourth section of the interview dealt with the actual purchase of the trip. This covered both the content of the purchase and the context of the purchase. The content relates to whether there was one purchase such as a city break package or a number of individual purchases such as flight, hotel, car-hire etc. Context relates to factors such as the timing of the purchase (e.g. last minute deal), booking preference (e.g. travel agent or internet website), and availability of the product(s). In addition the issue of who actually made the booking(s) was examined.

In section five the interview focuses on the respondents overall evaluation of the trip. This includes their image of the city prior to their visit, and their overall impression of their city break. The questioning here tried to ascertain the respondent's expectations of the trip before coming, and their subsequent perceptions having experienced it, what Moutinho (1987) refers to as tourist performance evaluation.

#### **4.11 Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis in Phase Two involved making sense out of the text or narrative data collected from the in-depth interviews. Although there are no set rules for analysing qualitative data, most researchers follow a generally similar pattern of analysis. Creswell (2003: p.190) describes a typical approach involving; preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Miles & Hubermann (1994, p.10) conveniently summarise the analysis approach into three main stages, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data reduction involves organising and structuring the text into a more manageable format. This includes reducing the data by breaking it down into "chunks" and attaching a reference or code to those chunks. Key themes and patterns in the data are identified and noted.

Data display involves summarising and presenting the structure and patterns that are emerging in the collected data. Miles & Huberman (1994, p.11) describe this as “designed to assemble organised information into an immediately accessible compact form so that the analyst can ...draw justified conclusions.” The display shows how the researcher has made connections between the different data chunks and assigned meanings to these connections.

Data verification involves checking for alternative explanations or seeking other means to verify the data. This may include ‘similar’ findings and explanations taken from different contexts.

This approach by Miles & Huberman was deemed appropriate for the data analysis requirements of Phase Two and was duly undertaken. However, it was necessary firstly to carry out the arduous but essential task of transcribing, from the audio tapes, all 40 interviews. These were transcribed in full and include pauses, laughs, sighs, and all prompts and probes, as suggested by Riley (1996, p.31). Due to the detail involved in this approach the transcription process took many months and resulted in hundreds of pages of transcribed data.

Following the assembly of all the data, each interview was carefully read through many times both separately and collectively in order to obtain what Creswell (2003, p.191) calls “a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.” This process was followed by the data reduction stage which involved dissecting the data into separate and analysable categories and sub-categories through a coding process. A ‘master list’ of all the codes that were developed and used can be seen in Appendix 4.4. The categories varied from general preset categories (such as the main stages of the decision making process) to emergent categories and subcategories that became apparent after working with the data. Segments of data that shared a common code were assembled separately and analysed thoroughly. They were then examined in the context of other segments in order to identify and highlight patterns between categories.

The results from this data analysis process are displayed in Chapters 6 and 7. These are presented using a mix of verbatim quotes and diagrammatic models to illustrate relevant themes and interconnections. In order to verify the credibility of the interpretations, consistencies and



differences with other research studies were examined. Comparisons were continuously made with a number of particularly relevant academic studies that had investigated similar topics through qualitative means. In addition, some of the results from the Dublin Visitor Survey were also used to compare and contrast with the emerging themes from the qualitative data. This form of triangulation proved very useful and allowed for more accurate and robust findings.

## **4.12 Summary**

This chapter has identified the paradigmatic options and methodological techniques available to the tourism researcher. Specifically, it has outlined, in detail, the methodological approach chosen for this particular research and importantly, the justification for that choice. As Adam and Healy (2000, p.51) state:

*...all methods are potentially useful assuming that they are used to investigate a type of research question to which they are well suited.*

This suitability or ‘methodological appropriateness’ as mentioned previously, was central to the rationale for selecting the research design for this study. A combined methods approach consisting of a phased pattern of inquiry was seen as the most appropriate to achieve the overall aims of the research. In Phase One, the need to build up a picture of city break visitors to Dublin in terms of their profile and the characteristics of their trips meant a broad quantitative enquiry was the most suitable. Thus, the Dublin Visitor Survey was utilised in order to gather and elicit the relevant data.

By contrast, the research objectives of Phase Two required richer and more detailed data relating to people’s motivations and decision making behaviour. This meant a qualitative approach was necessary, with in-depth interviews being selected as the most appropriate data gathering mechanism.

This combination of methods was seen as ideal in creating “a synergic relationship” (Schott, 2002, p.168) that added to the strength of the research effort. In addition, because the results

from Phase One fed into the planning and development of Phase Two, there was an inherent link and association between both parts of the research. Such a sequential triangulation approach, as outlined by Morse (1991, pp.120-123) offers clear advantages in terms of accuracy and rigor.

Although the research design, as outlined in this chapter, was carefully considered and selected, there are nonetheless a number of factors that need to be borne in mind. Firstly, the research uses Dublin city as a case study and as such some of the generalisability that could be offered by a wider investigation has been inevitably sacrificed. However, due to the exploratory nature of the research, depth was preferable to breadth in terms of the emphasis of the inquiry. Nonetheless, a future multi-city study, which builds on the results and issues uncovered in this research, would be very worthwhile and timely.

Another limiting factor that should be pointed out concerns the decision to interview city breakers while still on their trip. It could be argued that asking people to comment on their city break purchase before their holiday was completed, carried with it some limitations in relation to eliciting a full picture of respondent's post purchase evaluation of their trip. Ideally, city breakers would have been interviewed in their homes following their return. However, this presented a number of logistical, financial and temporal problems for the researcher. It was decided therefore to interview in Dublin, but to try to limit the bias by only interviewing people who had spent, at a minimum, one night in the city. In this way all respondents had at least some experience of the city and their trip and were in a position to comment on it.

While other constraints and limitations have been mentioned throughout this chapter the ones highlighted here represent the most significant to this research and therefore need to be considered in the overall context of the methodological approach selected.

# Chapter Five

## A Profile of City Break Visitors and their Trips

(Phase One)

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the first phase of the primary research. These findings relate to data elicited from a questionnaire based survey (the Dublin Visitor Survey), which was carried out on a sample of 1000 tourists over a twelve-month period. The main purpose of this part of the primary research (Phase One) is to provide a better understanding of the city break travel market and in particular, to address the following three objectives;

- to develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists,
- to analyse the distinctiveness of a city break holiday by finding out its principal characteristics and features, and
- to provide insights into some of the important aspects of the city break travel decision.

These objectives correspond to three of the main aims of the research, as outlined in the methodology chapter, - with the latter objective contributing, in part, to some of the study's principal aim of investigating the city break travel decision.

Finally, and importantly, the findings from this section also assist in the development of a sampling frame to be used for the in-depth interviews carried out in Phase Two.

## **5.2 Use of Comparative Analysis**

The findings highlighted in this chapter involve a comparative analysis between city break and non city break leisure visitors to Dublin. Significantly, this represents the first time city break visitors to a city have been segmented and analysed in such a way. Both visitor cohorts refer to commercial holidaymakers only – therefore, neither includes, business, VFR, or study travellers. Such an approach is novel, as it means both segments are isolated on the basis of 'type of trip,' with one cohort representing holidaymakers who are visiting the city only (and nowhere else), and the other representing those visiting the city as part of a wider trip. Such a segmentation approach, based on the nature of the trip (as opposed to purpose of trip), is quite rare in tourism studies and yet potentially offers more valuable and insightful data.

### 5.3 Statistical Analysis

Having elicited frequencies and cross-tabulated the relevant data, chi-square tests were conducted to examine any statistically significant associations between type of visitor and a variety of variables relating to their trip. In addition, the strength of the association between these variables was examined using the Cramer's V coefficient. These statistics are presented under three main categories, each of which relates to the Phase One objectives outlined at the start. The first category examines the profile of the city break traveller and includes analysis of five important variables, *age*, *gender*, *country of origin*, *education*, and *occupation*. The second category highlights the characteristics of the city break trip itself and examines *length of visit*, *party composition*, and *timing of visit*. The final category relates to elements of the decision process and includes four main variables, *information sources*, *influencing factors*, *booking behaviour*, and *activities engaged in*.

### 5.4 Visitor Profile

The strength of associations between type of holidaymaker and the range of variables relating to visitor profile revealed significant differences in three cases; *origin of visitors*, *education* and *occupation*, with a particularly strong association being observed in the first two. These statistics can be seen in Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 below, with Table 5.4 showing the overall picture regarding significance levels for all visitor profile variables tested.

#### 5.4.1 Visitor Origin

In relation to visitor origin, a marked difference is evident between the two visitor segments (see Table 5.1), with the vast majority (80.5%) of city breakers coming from neighbouring Britain and very few (3.4%) originating from North America. By contrast, the non city break holidaymakers show a more even distribution in terms of origin. Although a heavy reliance on the British market for city break custom was generally known, the extent of the dependence was not. These figures show a very high reliance level, particularly when contrasted to the overall statistic for British visitors to Dublin, which lies at a much smaller 52%. In contrast, the findings show that mainland European visitors are considerably less likely to take a city break holiday to Dublin.

**Table 5.1**  
**Origin of Visitors by Type of Holidaymaker**

<b>Origin</b>	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
UK	80.5%	30.8%
North America	3.4%	29.8%
Mainland Europe	14.8%	30.5%
Rest of the World	1.3%	8.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

No doubt, this difference is strongly linked to the availability of cheap air access into Dublin. Although many new routes from a number of different countries in mainland Europe have emerged in recent years, they still come nowhere near the number of routes from Britain. The fact remains that Dublin is more accessible from its nearest neighbour than from any other source market. This is similar to many other city destinations in Europe. Prague for example, one of Europe's premier city break destinations, has 221 flights a week with its large neighbour Germany - representing the greatest number of air connections into the city (Prague Airport Statistics, 2006).

#### **5.4.2 Education**

With regard to education, the findings show that non city break holidaymakers are more likely to have attained higher levels of education than city breakers (see Table 5.2). For example, they are significantly more likely to have progressed from secondary level and also twice as likely to have a postgraduate qualification. City breakers on the other hand are more likely to have completed an apprenticeship or trade qualification.

**Table 5.2**  
**Education by Type of Holidaymaker**

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
Secondary level or less	22.9%	12.5%
Apprenticeship /trade qualification	7.7%	3.9%
Post secondary level certification	9.3%	8.4%
Third Level Diploma / Degree	43.4%	48.2%
Higher Degree	12.8%	24.3%
Other	4.0%	2.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

Although these particular figures may at first seem to portray city breakers as less educated than other city holidaymakers, it is important to point out that more than half of all this segment (56%) have a third level qualification. It may be more accurate to describe city breakers as displaying a greater range of educational achievement compared to non city break holidaymakers.

#### **5.4.3 Occupation**

The third visitor profile variable to show statistical significance was occupation. Although the strength of this association was not as great as the previous two variables, nonetheless, some interesting variations between the visitor groups were detected. The statistics reveal a higher proportion of non city break holidaymakers are drawn from the upper strata groupings, such as senior and middle management. They also show a slightly higher proportion of city breakers to be blue collar or skilled workers. Interestingly, this may indicate that city break trips are more accessible to the general population as a type of holiday, compared to other international leisure trips.

**Table 5.3**  
**Occupation by Type of Holidaymaker**

<b>Occupation Grouping</b>	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
Senior Executive Senior Civil Servant	2.1%	4.8%
Professional / Middle Management	22.5%	30.0%
Office clerk / White Collar worker	36.5%	31.7%
Skilled Worker Blue Collar	37.6%	32.5%
Unskilled/ Unemployed Other	1.3%	1.2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

It should be pointed out however that there were ten occupation groupings in the original questionnaire. However, in running the chi-square test, this resulted in low counts in more than 20% of the cells and as such it did not satisfy the test requirements. Some groupings were subsequently amalgamated in order to conform to these requirements. Thus, although every effort was made to ensure the groupings were appropriate, some subtle differences between the groups may be obscured.

The chi-square and Cramer's V statistics for all five visitor profile variables are highlighted in Table 5.4. This shows, not only the three variables just covered, but also two additional visitor profile variables, age and gender. However, no statistically significant associations were detected with either of these. This means city breakers showed little difference from non city break holidaymakers in relation to their age and gender. An interesting observation with regard to age was the even distribution pattern displayed by both visitor segments. Although, it may have been speculated that city break visitors to Dublin would have shown a somewhat younger age profile, this did not turn out to be the case.



**Table 5.4**  
**Chi-square Test on Type of Visitor and Visitor Profile Variables**

Visitor Profile Characteristic	Significance Level	Cramer's V	P value < 0.05 ( $\lambda$ )
Origin	0.000	0.518	$\lambda$
Age	0.569	0.078	
Occupation	0.023	0.120	$\lambda$
Education	0.000	0.206	$\lambda$
Gender	0.159	0.050	

*Note:* The symbol ' $\lambda$ ' signifies that statistically significant associations were detected.

In fact, city breakers displayed a slightly lower presence in the 25 to 34 age bracket compared to non city break holidaymakers (21.4% versus 23.6%).

With regard to gender, the statistics showed a slightly higher tendency for women to take city breaks. However this association was quite weak and again not statistically significant.

## 5.5 Trip Characteristics

Having examined variables relating to the nature of the city break visitor, the attention now turns to the second main area of investigation, the nature of the city break trip itself. Again, the comparative analysis approach was used in order to place the city break trip in some kind of context against which it could be measured. Thus, the two visitor groups were analysed against variables that related to the characteristics of their trip and again the chi-square test was applied to measure associations. Three variables stood out as being particularly significant, they were, *length of visit*, *party composition* and *timing of visit*. Each of these will now be discussed in more detail with related statistics being presented in corresponding tables that include relevant chi-square and p values.

### 5.5.1 Length of Trip

In presenting findings in relation to each visitor segment's length of trip, it is important to firstly point out the wording that was used in the survey question. Respondents were asked how many nights they would be away from home on their trip. This phrasing was deliberate, as it was important to make a distinction between nights spent away from home and nights spent in Dublin. It was realised that 'nights spent in Dublin' would not detect the full duration of the non city break holidaymaker's trips – as these included visiting other places besides Dublin. Thus, the wording 'nights spent away from home' was used, as it managed to capture the full length of each group's trips.

City breaks have generally been assumed, in the literature, to be of a short duration. The findings from the data clearly back up this assumption. As Table 5.5 highlights, city breakers are significantly more likely to take a shorter trip compared to other leisure visitors. Although this finding is not surprising, the degree of difference between the two visitor segments is interesting to observe. Over half of all city breakers (56%) stayed three nights or less in Dublin. This compares to just 5.8% of other non city break holidaymakers. However, the statistics also show quite a high number of city break visitors staying four to seven nights. Indeed, more than a third of all city break visitors fall into this category.

**Table 5.5**  
**Length of Trip by Type of Holidaymaker**

$\chi^2=360.3$ $p = 0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.673	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
1-3 nights	55.7%	5.8%
4-7 nights	35.4%	23.6%
8-14 nights	6.6%	42.8%
> 14 nights	2.4%	27.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

This is an interesting discovery and clearly shows that not all city breaks are short breaks (1-3 nights), as they are commonly perceived. This finding would also seem to support Trew and Cockrell's (2002) assertion that in Europe, city breaks of 4 to 5 nights, appear to be growing faster than average. However, although a significant number may not technically be described as short breaks (1-3 nights), there is little doubt that overall, the duration of a city break is generally shorter than most other international trips. The findings clearly show this, with a huge 91% consisting of seven nights or less compared to just 29% for non city break holidaymakers.

### 5.5.2 Party Composition

The results in relation to travel party composition show two noteworthy findings. Firstly, the data (see Table 5.6) highlight the prevalence of couples in city break trip taking. Almost 60% of all city break trips consisted of people travelling with a partner. In contrast the numbers travelling with a family totalled just 15%. This highlights a noticeable absence of children and points to a perceptible adult bias in city break trip taking. Interestingly, the equivalent family figure for non city break holidaymakers is also rather low at 20%. This may raise issues in relation to Dublin, and indeed Ireland, as a family friendly destination.

**Table 5.6**  
**Travel Party Composition by Type of Holidaymaker**

$\chi^2=20.56$ $p=0.001$ Cramer's V = 0.164	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
Alone	5.8%	7.5%
With Partner	59.3%	48.6%
With Family	14.8%	20.0%
Group of friends	17.9%	16.7%
Group Trip	1.6%	7.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

### 5.5.3 Timing of Visit

In order to investigate differences between the two visitor segments in relation to when they took their trips, an analysis of each group's monthly arrival pattern was undertaken. To present the monthly data in a more meaningful way, the findings were organised according to the four main seasons. Therefore, 'summer' consists of data from May, June and July, while 'autumn' involves August, September, and October, and so on. These groupings provide a clearer view of the seasonal variations between the two visitor segments.

The important theme that emerges from the data is the lack of seasonal sensitivity shown by city break travellers. As Table 5.7 plainly indicates, city break visitors arrived in Dublin in significant numbers throughout the year. Even the winter months accounted for more than 17% of their trips. This is four times greater than the corresponding figure for non city break holidays (4.3%). With arrival patterns such as these, it is not surprising that product providers are increasingly seeing the value of city break travellers in terms of seasonal spread. This is particularly the case for those establishments that do not (or cannot) attract the business travel segment, and who are therefore more affected by seasonal demand.

**Table 5.7**  
**Timing of Visit by Type of Holidaymaker**

$\chi^2=51.68$ <b>p= 0.000</b> Cramer's V = 0.255	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
Winter	17.2%	4.3%
Spring	23.2%	14.9%
Summer	34.0%	43.3%
Autumn	25.6%	37.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

The data up to now confirm the distinctiveness of the city break travel market in terms of both city breakers themselves and the trips they take. The findings reveal city breakers and their trips to have a number of noticeable characteristics, most of which support previous assertions found in the literature (Trew & Cockerell, 2002; Law, 2002). The final category of variables examined concerns the city break travel decision. The results in relation to this are presented next.

## **5.6. The Travel Decision**

Having examined city breaker's visitor profile and trip characteristics, the spotlight now turns to the third main area of investigation, the travel decision. Although this topic represents the principal focus of Phase Two, some significant findings were also uncovered in the survey data. These findings relate to different aspects of the travel decision, including; *sources of information used*, *influencing factors* on the decision, *booking behaviour*, and *activities engaged in* at the destination. Again, chi-square was used to examine any statistically significant associations. The results show associations were detected in relation to information sources, booking behaviour, and four of the influencing factors measured.

### **5.6.1 Information Sources**

Respondents were asked to indicate the range of places they searched for information before booking their trip. Differences were noted between the two visitor groups in relation to three information sources in particular; friends and family, travel agents, and brochures (see Table 5.8). With regard to family and friends the findings show city break visitors were twice as likely to use such an information source as non city break holidaymakers. By contrast, they were significantly less inclined to consult with travel agents or brochures for information.

**Table 5.8**  
**Sources of Information Consulted before Trip**

$X^2=24.02$ $p=0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.199	City Break Holidaymaker	Non City Break Holidaymaker
Brochures	8.8%	17.8%
Internet	45.0%	42.7%
Friends / family	21.2%	10.3%
Travel Agent	3.5%	6.9%
Guidebook	20.0%	20.1%
Other	1.5%	2.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

One of the main findings however, relates to the growing importance of the internet as an information tool. Both visitor cohorts confirmed the web as their main source of knowledge. City breakers were slightly more inclined to search online for information before their trip (45%) compared to non city break holidaymakers (43%). However, the difference is small, and shows the importance of the internet as an information source for both travel groups.

Similarly, little difference was detected between the two visitor groups in relation to the usage of guidebooks. Both groups availed of this source of information to the same extent (20%). This figure represents quite a significant level of usage, and shows the popularity of guidebooks as a source of information. Indeed, for non city break visitors, guidebooks signify the second most consulted information source after the internet.

### **5.6.2 Influencing Factors on Travel Decision**

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate a series of nineteen factors in terms of how much they influenced the decision to visit Dublin. The results show that the factors with the most influence were similar for both groups of holidaymakers. These factors were; *inexpensive airfare*, *previous visit*, *advice from friends and relatives*, *guidebook*, *internet site*, and *travel agent*. However, within these variables certain differences between the visitor groups were detected. When the chi-square test was applied, the results show four

of these influencing factors to be statistically significant, with particularly strong associations being detected in three; inexpensive airfare, previous visit, and guidebook. The results are highlighted in Table 5.9 and clearly show some interesting differences between the two types of holidaymakers in terms of what influenced them to take the trip. For example, *inexpensive airfare* was a particularly important influencing factor for the city break group with almost one in three citing it as a major influence in their decision to visit Dublin. This would seem to support the point made previously that cheap airfares act as a significant driving force in city break travel. By contrast, the findings show inexpensive flights seemed to matter much less to non city break holidaymakers, with just over 11% recognising it as a major influence on their travel decision.

**Table 5.9**  
**Factors Influencing Decision to Visit Dublin by Type of Holidaymaker**

	<b><i>Inexpensive Airfare</i></b> $\chi^2=55.81$ $p=0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.266 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>		<b><i>Previous Visit</i></b> $\chi^2=26.61$ $p=0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.183 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>	
Major influence	32.6%	11.4%	24.3%	11.8%
Some influence	8.0%	6.6%	6.6%	13.0%
Little / No influence	59.4%	82.0%	69.1%	75.2 %
	<b><i>Friends and Relatives</i></b> $\chi^2=1.33$ $p=0.513$ Cramer's V = 0.041 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>		<b><i>Guidebook</i></b> $\chi^2=31.30$ $p=0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.200 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>	
Major influence	28.0%	24.6%	2.9%	6.8%
Some influence	25.6%	28.0%	8.0%	19.9%
Little / No Influence	46.4%	47.5%	89.0%	73.3%
	<b><i>Travel Agent</i></b> $\chi^2=5.25$ $p=0.072$ Cramer's V = 0.082 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>		<b><i>Internet site</i></b> $\chi^2=6.30$ $p=0.043$ Cramer's V = 0.090 <b>CBH                  Non CBH</b>	
Major influence	1.3%	2.9%	5.1%	4.4%
Some influence	1.3%	3.1%	10.2%	16.2%
Little / No influence	97.3%	94.0%	84.8%	79.4%
Total =	(379)	(416)	(379)	(416)

Note:      **CBH**      =      City Break Holidaymakers  
              **Non CBH** =      Non City Break Holidaymakers

Both visitor segments also differed significantly in relation to a *previous visit*. This factor represented a considerable influence on city break visitors with almost 25% stating it was a major factor in their decision. This compares to a corresponding figure of less than 12% for non city break holidaymakers. Such findings indicate city breakers to be more likely to repeat visit and therefore show destination loyalty.

The third area where both visitor segments showed marked differences was in relation to *guidebooks*. Although less dominant as an influential element compared to the previous factors, guidebooks proved more important for non city break holidaymakers, with over 26% claiming they had either a major or some influence on their travel decision. This compares to just fewer than 11% for city breakers (of which just 2.9% represented a major influence). This highlights guidebooks' lack of influence on city breakers when making their travel decision, and contrasts noticeably with the results in the previous section that show a high number (20%) using guidebooks as an information source. Such a finding illustrates the importance of differentiating between people's usage of an information source and the actual influence it has on their travel decision.

Both groups of visitors were shown to be heavily influenced by the opinions of *family and friends*. Over half of each segment stated such sources had at least some influence on their decision. However, it is interesting to compare this to the findings from the previous section which records much smaller numbers (of both visitor groups) consulting with family and friends before their trip. Thus, the figures seem to show more people being influenced by family and friends than actually consulted them for information. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that people can sometimes receive information without necessarily having solicited it. In other words, family and friends might have contributed their opinions and views about Dublin without necessarily having been asked. In any case, the essential thing to note is the importance which people attach to such familiar and perceived trustworthy information sources.



### 5.6.3 Booking Behaviour

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their booking behaviour. Following chi-square testing the results showed some strong associations between type of holidaymaker and certain variables relating to their booking behaviour. Significant differences between both visitor groups were particularly evident in relation to *methods of booking* and *timing of booking* (see Tables 5.10, 5.11, & 5.12).

**Table 5.10**  
**Method of Booking Travel to Dublin**

$\chi^2=51.41$ $p=0.000$ Cramer's V = 0.254	City Break Holidaymaker	Non City Break Holidaymaker
Travel Agent / Tour Operator	21.4%	41.6%
Internet	64.9%	40.1%
Direct with Transport	7.4%	10.3%
Other	6.3%	7.9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

With regard to methods of booking used, the data clearly illustrates the importance of the internet as a booking tool, especially for city break visitors whom the findings show were significantly more likely to book their transport online compared to non city break holidaymakers. Conversely they were a lot less likely to use a travel agent or tour operator, with just one in five choosing to book their transport through an intermediary. Such booking behaviour is likely to reflect the lower perceived risk associated with city breaks compared to longer stay holidays. City breaks tend to be less complex trips with fewer components, making the prospect of 'doing it yourself' more appealing in terms of searching for information and making bookings. This is an important factor that is explored further in Phase Two.

**Table 5.11**  
**Method of Booking Accommodation to Dublin**

$\chi^2=33.29$ <b>p= 0.000</b> Cramer's V = 0.205	<b>City Break Holidaymaker</b>	<b>Non City Break Holidaymaker</b>
Travel Agent / Tour Operator	20.1%	33.2%
Internet	50.4%	31.3%
Direct with Accommodation	15.6%	17.3%
Other	14.0%	18.3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

A similar, although less pronounced, booking pattern is evident in relation to accommodation. For the city break cohort the internet again proved to be the number one method, with over half choosing to book their accommodation online. By comparison, for non city break holidaymakers, the internet ranked second (at 31%) behind travel agents. So, although the internet's importance as a booking method is evident for both visitor groups, it is clear for city breakers it has increased significance.

As well as showing differences in the way each visitor group booked their trips, the findings also demonstrate variations in relation to when the bookings were made (see Table 5.12). The city break segment showed a marked leaning towards purchasing late, with over 56% booking less than a month before their trip. This compares to 37% for non city break holidaymakers. Not surprisingly, this pattern is reversed at the other end where city breakers showed much less inclination for booking holidays far in advance. Just 6% booked their accommodation twelve weeks or more before their trip, compared to almost 17% of non city break holidaymakers.

**Table 5.12**  
**Timing of Booking for Accommodation**

$\chi^2=53.89$ $p=0.000$ Cramer V = 0.260	City Break Holidaymaker	Non City Break Holidaymaker
Less than a week	10.8%	8.2%
1-4 weeks before	45.4%	28.8%
5-8 weeks before	21.1%	17.1%
9-12 weeks before	8.4%	10.6%
>12 weeks	6.3%	16.8%
Not applicable	7.9%	18.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(379)</i>	<i>100%</i> <i>(416)</i>

These figures represent a general trend in contemporary trip taking towards later bookings. However, within this general trend the city break segment seems to feature particularly strongly. The findings show city breakers demonstrating a more delayed or last minute booking pattern compared to other city holidaymakers. The reasons behind such booking behaviour are not fully clear - although, it may be an indication of the discretionary aspect of such trips i.e., the unplanned, and in some cases, rather impulsive nature of the decision making involved. Certainly, the city break results point towards lower involvement decision behaviour compared to other holidaymakers. Importantly, the results from Phase Two shed more light on this significant issue.

#### **5.6.4 Visitor Behaviour in Dublin**

Both traveller segments were analysed in terms of the range of activities they engaged in, and the tourism suppliers' products they used in Dublin. With one or two logical exceptions no strong associations were found between the variables in this section. In other words, both city break visitors and non city break holidaymakers showed similar consumption behaviour patterns at the destination. There were no great differences in terms of the product providers they used or the activities they engaged in. For both groups of visitors 'sightseeing' was the most popular activity when visiting the city, followed by 'walking around the city', and 'going out in the evening to a bar or restaurant'. In terms of accommodation used, both visitor

segments showed generally similar usage patterns, with just two exceptions - city breakers were slightly more likely to use budget hotels, while non city break holidaymakers showed more inclination towards B&B accommodation. Overall though, the findings were noteworthy only for the similarity shown by both sets of visitors in terms of their consumption behaviour.

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter presents the findings from Phase One of the primary research. Using a comparative analysis approach and applying chi-square, the findings highlight areas where the city break visitor segment shows variation and distinctiveness from other city holidaymakers. Findings relating to visitor profile, trip characteristics and the travel decision were specifically focused on, in order to address the objectives of Phase One.

The results in relation to visitor profile show a number of interesting differences amongst the two visitor groups. Firstly, a dominance by British visitors was noticeable within the city break segment. It is likely this dominance is a result of familiarity and accessibility factors, however this will be explored further in Phase Two. City break visitors also showed more inclination towards repeat visiting, with loyalty behaviour being much more in evidence. In addition, city breakers showed a more varied distribution pattern in relation to their educational and occupational backgrounds.

Findings in relation to the second area of focus – trip characteristics – also highlighted a number of distinctive aspects of the city break segment. For example, city breakers showed a clear preference for shorter holidays, particularly trips between one and three nights. This seems to back up Burtenshaw et al.'s (1991) assertion that visitors to cities can grasp the attractions of a city in just a few days. Although, it was also interesting to observe the significant number of people choosing relatively 'longer' city breaks of 4-7 nights.

City break trips also proved particularly popular for couples, with the majority of people travelling with a partner. Interestingly, children hardly featured at all in these trips, indicating city breaker's apparent preference for adult focused holidays.

Another important characteristic to emerge was the distinctive arrival patterns shown. City breakers tendency to come during off peak periods when overall visitor demand is low, was quite noticeable. Obviously such a characteristic makes them an attractive prospect for city tourism businesses.

The third main area of investigation, the travel decision, also yielded some important findings. For example, city break visitors proved to be considerable users of the internet, both in terms of sourcing information and booking online. They were significantly more likely to book both their travel and accommodation online compared to non city break leisure visitors. In addition, they tended to display a more impulsive decision making pattern of behaviour (evident from both the late timing of their bookings and the considerable influence that cheap airfares had on their decision to travel). This supports Page's (2002) assumption about the influence of the internet and the secondary nature of such trips. However, this is examined in more detail in Phase Two when the reasons and motivations behind this behaviour are explored.

In summary, these results provide valuable information on one of the most under-researched visitor groups in tourism literature. City break travellers have rarely been isolated and examined as a separate visitor segment. The data has shed new light on this group and provide important insights into the characteristics of their behaviour.

In line with the objectives of Phase One, the findings have focused on three important areas; visitor profile, trip characteristics, and the travel decision. These findings will in turn contribute to the discussion chapter (Chapter 7), when all the data relating to the research will be considered and discussed in the context of addressing the overall aims of the study.

As pointed out in the methodology chapter, this research follows a sequential triangulation approach. This means the findings from one part of the research are used to assist in the development of the second. Thus, specific aspects of the data in this chapter (Phase One) were used to help choose an accurate group of city break respondents for in-depth interviewing in Phase Two. Findings relating to visitor origin, age profile, timing of visit, and activities engaged in were particularly useful, and greatly contributed to the selection of a representative sample of city break visitors to Dublin. In the end this helped ensure a more efficient and effective interview process and resulted in the eliciting of more reliable data.

The results from this in-depth interview process (Phase Two) are presented in the following chapter.

# Chapter Six

## City Break Motivation and Decision Making (Phase Two)

## 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a useful profile of Dublin's city break visitor market. It described a visitor group made up mostly of couples that typically stay for short durations (less than 4 nights), and travel short haul distances (mostly from the UK). In addition, city breakers were seen to make independent travel arrangements and follow a less seasonal demand pattern with a higher inclination towards repeat visiting. Finally, they were found to display a more varied education and occupation background compared to other city visitors.

As well as providing this clearer profile of the city break visitor, Phase One data also shed some light on the city break decision process. The findings revealed city break visitors to be significant users of the internet for both information searching and booking purposes. They also showed a higher inclination towards late or last minute booking behaviour.

However, these latter findings provide only general insights into the city break decision process. In order to obtain more incisive and meaningful data it was necessary to undertake a qualitative examination of the topic. This involved carrying out in-depth interviews with 40 city break visitors to Dublin. The intention was to gain a thorough understanding of each visitor's travel decision 'story' from beginning to end. These stories provided, what Geertz (1973) calls, "thick descriptions" of people's experiences. Such rich data contrast with the findings from Phase One where the focus was centred on numbers and frequencies. Here the emphasis is on exploring the meanings behind people's 'social experience,' using narrative data and text (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This data focused on all main aspects of the city break decision process including motives, information gathering, choice, purchase, and consumption experiences. In addition, in order to provide some useful comparative data, respondents were asked to compare their city break decision with that of their last main holiday in three specific areas; **motives, level of involvement, and booking behaviour**. These results are presented in three separate sections in this chapter; the data in relation to motives are discussed in the general motives section, the findings relating to level of involvement are presented at the end of the information search section, and comparisons in relation to bookings are explained under the purchase behaviour section.



The overall objective of the inquiry was to generate a fuller picture of city break visitor's decision to come to Dublin. Personal interviews proved very useful in this regard as they provided the opportunity to probe visitors in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner. As Teare (1994) points out, such an approach is very useful as it provides the means of exploring the consumer decision process holistically.

## **6.2 Analysis of the Data**

Following a qualitative approach, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), the data analysis involved reading and re-reading the text, assigning abbreviated codes, and identifying coherent categories and subcategories. The focus of the analysis was firstly based on how individuals responded to each of the main decision making stages. These stages were, in a sense, preset categories and consisted of the following;

- ❖ Need recognition and motives,
- ❖ Information search,
- ❖ Alternative evaluation,
- ❖ Purchase behaviour, and
- ❖ Post purchase evaluation.

These five categories are well established in the literature and helped greatly in terms of providing a general structure for both the interviews and analysis – the results presented in this chapter will also follow this structure for convenience. Inside of these main preset categories a wide range of emergent categories evolved. These consisted of themes or issues that constantly recurred in the data. Through detailed analysis, categories were continually formed until no new themes or subcategories could be identified. Part of the analysis process consisted of an examination of the relevant literature. This was done in order to identify both consistencies and differences with previous research. In particular, research that investigated the travel decision from a qualitative approach was consulted. The following studies were particularly useful in this regard; Crompton (1979), Teare (1994), Fodness (1994), Decrop & Snelders (2004), Schott (2002), Woodside & McDonald (1994), and Bloy (2000).

The main findings from the interviews are now presented according to each of the principal five stages of the travel decision process, as outlined previously. In addition, the data in relation to respondent's city break and main holiday comparisons are presented separately in the motives, information search, and purchase sections of the chapter.

### **6.3 Need Recognition and Motives**

As highlighted in the literature review, needs generate uncomfortable states of tension within individual's minds and bodies. Middleton (1994, p.56) points out that these tensions:

*are often associated with a longing to escape for a while into forms of self-indulgence as well as self development, usually with family or chosen companions.*

He goes on to comment that motivations represent the dynamic process in consumer behaviour that bridge the gap between the felt need and the decision to act or purchase. Goodall & Ashworth (1988) have described how holiday choice is based on person-specific motivation and destination-specific attributes, commonly known as the push/pull factors. The desire to take a holiday pushes people into a decision, while the attraction of destination attributes and images pulls the person to a specific location. One of the central aims of the primary research in this study was to gain a better understanding of why people take city breaks. Most discussions in the travel motivation literature have tended to centre on the concept of "push" and "pull" factors – mainly because it provides a simple and intuitive approach for explaining why people travel. Consequently, investigating the underlying push and pull motives behind people's visits to Dublin was seen as crucial in the interview process.

In order to get a detailed picture of these motives, respondents were asked to explain fully how the idea for taking a trip to Dublin first came into their mind. From this, the main motives for the trip were teased out and probed. In addition, respondents were asked to think back to their last main holiday and explain the motives involved in that decision. The results showed some interesting variations between the motives for each type of trip. These are illustrated in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, and are presented in the form of the principal push and pull factors for each type of trip. Such a comparison was quite useful as it allowed city break motives to be viewed in the context of another type of trip. The motives in each table are

listed in order of prevalence in the research findings, that is, how often the motives were cited as a reason for taking the trip. The categories were formed by applying the content analysis method outlined above, with the exact labels being assigned to each category according to their relevance to the narrative data and concurrence with previous motivational studies.

**Table 6.1**  
**City Break Push and Pull Factors**

<b>Push Factors</b>		<b>Pull Factors</b>	
Escape	(38%)	Convenience / Ease of Access	(35%)
Socialise (internal)	(33%)	Cost of travel	(33%)
Self Esteem (gift giving)	(15%)	Fun destination image	(23%)
Fun / Excitement	(13%)	Pre arranged event	(23%)
Socialise (external)	(10%)	Friendly image	(13%)
Relax	(10%)	Previous visit	(10%)
		Tourist sites	(5%)
		Security / Familiarity	(5%)

**Table 6.2**  
**Main Holiday Push and Pull Factors**

<b>Push</b>		<b>Pull</b>	
Relax	(35%)	Sun, sand, sea	(38%)
Social	(25%)	Positive/Fun Image	(20%)
Escape	(20%)	Quality of facilities	(15%)
Fun/ Excitement	(10%)	Cost of trip	(10%)
Prestige	(8%)	Previous visit	(10%)
Education	(8%)	VFR	(8%)

Although the findings from this research show many similarities to other studies on tourism motivation in terms of the actual push and pull motives revealed, interesting variations emerged when these motives were analysed on the basis of type of trip. Some clear differences between the reasons respondents travelled to Dublin on a city break and the reasons they went on a main holiday were discovered. These are now explained under the headings of push and pull motives.

### **6.3.1 Push Factors in Motivation to Travel**

Push factors are considered to be socio-psychological motivations that predispose a person to travel. They tend to be intangible or intrinsic desires relating to the needs and wants of the individual that lead to the decision to take a holiday (Klenosky, 2002).

In the interviews respondents were questioned on their underlying reasons for taking a city break to Dublin – the factors that provided the drive or push to take the trip. The findings in relation to their push motives revealed a number of interesting themes which are presented next.

#### **6.3.1.1 Escape Factor**

The findings show that the ‘escape’ motive was the most frequently mentioned reason for taking a city break. ‘Escape’ refers to what Crompton (1979) calls, “a temporary change of environment” which is “physically and socially different from the environment in which one normally lives.” Iso-Ahola (1982) refers to this push phenomenon as “avoidance,” the notion of people taking a holiday in order to get away from something or someone. For many respondents, the city break provided an ideal vehicle to escape from the humdrum of the home environment:

*“A city is good for a break. There is lots to do and see. You can do nothing or do lots, it’s up to yourself. We decided to just get away, sample a bit of life in a different city”* (Beverly, Leeds).

The escape was not always just a break from a mundane environment either - many people were using the city break as a respite from the pressures of parenting:

*“We have a young son - he’s one and a half and he’s into everything at the moment. Jane’s mother took him for these few days. It’s great to just get the break”* (Brian, Nottingham).

This is consistent with Teare’s (1994) findings when he investigated people’s motives for purchasing hotel leisure breaks in the UK. One of the six primary motives he discovered concerns people’s need for a break from family or domestic commitments.

Interestingly ‘escape’ was cited far less frequently as a motive for respondents’ main holidays. It ranked third, well behind the motive of ‘relaxing’, which was found to be the principal reason for people taking a main holiday. Most respondents felt that their main holiday was all about “chilling out,” “unwinding,” and “recharging the batteries.” In contrast, the city break was perceived more as a ‘doing’ holiday, getting out and about and seeing things. People did not perceive such trips as an opportunity to laze around a hotel room or catch up on sleep. The difference between the two types of holidays is apparent from the following response from a visitor when he compared his last main holiday to his city break to Dublin:

*“Portugal was probably more relaxing with us lazing about, whereas Dublin would be more a short break where there is so much to do, and you are walking a lot, you’re seeing a lot, you know, you are doing a lot – we seem to be doing a lot”* (Kieran, Northern Ireland).

Interestingly this ‘doing’ aspect of city breaks is one of the main ways in which they differ from many other types of short breaks. For example, many people go on short breaks to spa hotels or seaside resorts with the explicit intention of relaxing and ‘doing’ very little. City breaks tend to differ from such trips in this regard - performing instead a more active role in peoples’ minds.

#### **6.3.1.2 Social Factor**

The second most popular motive for taking a city break involved the desire to satisfy a social need. This again is a common push motive found in many motivational studies. Crompton divides the social motive into two main categories; enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction. The former refers to the desire to enhance or enrich family relationships, while the latter represents a need to “meet new people in different locations.” The findings for Dublin indicate the presence of both of these motives and these are classified

as ‘internal’ for socialising within the travel party, and ‘external’ for socialising outside the travel party (see Table 6.1).

For city break trips, the desire to enhance relationships was found to be, primarily, in the context of partners, spouses or other adults, and rarely involved families with children. In a number of cases the trips had a romantic element:

*“It is a good chance for us to have a good time alone, together, in a nice...atmosphere”* (Philippe, Paris).

For one couple the city break to Dublin was actually their honeymoon and therefore had particular significance in this regard. Where children were present it was often the case that they were older:

*“A lot of the motivation was to get a break with my daughter because she is away at university, it’s her first year away”* (Diane, London).

Many city breakers also cited the desire to socialise with friends as an important motivating factor. This included respondents who were part of stag/hen parties or groups of friends just getting away for a break together:

*“I suppose it was a good chance to get away with some mates, have some fun and enjoy a different setting”* (Michael, Surrey).

The other social element that Crompton refers to - the desire to meet with other people at the destination - was also evident for city breakers. Dublin was perceived, by some respondents, as being a place where they could easily interact with locals and this was, in a few cases, a key motivating factor:

*“I think listening to music in pubs and meeting and talking to people – this is important to me in Dublin. Irish people like to talk and so, I think, it is easy”* (Maria, Italy).

Interestingly, for the main holiday travel decision - although the social need was also found to be important - the specifics of the underlying motivation appeared to be quite different. For example, the enhancement of relationships in most cases included a wider family unit, mostly involving children - indicating a desire for people to use the main holiday as a chance to come together and spend “quality time” as a family. In addition, the other social element of meeting with locals at the destination hardly figured at all for main holidays.

#### **6.3.1.3 Gift Giving**

One of the most interesting findings in relation to the city break travel decision was the manner in which some trips were given as a gift to mark some event or occasion. Six interviewees were on a city break that they had either purchased or had received as a gift (birthdays and anniversaries were the main reasons involved). The ultimate motivation behind such gift giving was interesting to observe. On one level, the trips were purchased for quite altruistic motives: *“The reason we came this time was Kev had a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and this was my birthday present to him”* (Paula, Birmingham), but on another level, self esteem motives were also evident, i.e. the giving of a city break as a present made people feel good about themselves. It would seem from the findings that city breaks are quite suited as gift products, possibly because of the novelty aspect but also due to the relative low cost and generally uncomplicated nature of the trips compared to other types of holidays.

Such gift giving behaviour was not evident with main holiday motives, although this is understandable given the cost of many of these trips. However, a motive which *was* evident here and which is particularly associated with more expensive and exotic main holidays was ‘prestige.’ This relates to what Fodness (1994, p.564) calls the “value expressive function of leisure travel” where the trip represents a combination of both symbolism and self-expression. This is evident in the following response, where one of the interviewees was explaining his motives for visiting Singapore on a main holiday:

*“Well it’s very exotic, somewhere not everyone goes to - it’s different. It’s nice, I suppose, to be able to say you have had afternoon tea in Raffles hotel isn’t it?”* (Simon, London).

No such motives were evident for city break trip taking – probably because of the relative familiarity of the destination, and possibly, as Crompton points out, “as travel has become more frequent, it is perceived to be less prestigious.” In addition, the ‘low cost’ perception of

city breaks may also have contributed to their lack of apparent status. Gilbert & Terrata (2001) found such a scenario when they examined Japanese motives for taking outbound holidays. They noticed that the Japanese, notably the young, appeared not to regard overseas travel as a prestigious product. They concluded that this was associated with cost, that is, people may accept a costly product, as a 'status symbol', but when the product becomes common, and is thought of as reasonable in price it then loses its prestige value.

#### **6.3.1.4 Fun/Excitement**

The final push motive revealed for city breaks is termed "fun / excitement" and relates to the pleasure seeking desire of travellers. This motive was prevalent not just among the more hedonistic stag and hen party respondents but also with a number of others who came to Dublin to get away and have some fun:

*"We just came here to kick back and have a blast. My husband Phil and my friend Beth's husband Tom went away earlier this year on a golfing vacation to Florida - so we decided we needed to have some quality girl time, and here we are"* (Sandy, New York).

This need to inject some fun and recreation into one's life was often interlinked with the escape motive. In other words, people wanted to get away (escape), but to do so with a clear goal in mind – to have some fun.

#### **6.3.2 Pull Factors in Motivation to Travel**

Push and pull motives are generally seen as relating to two separate aspects of the travel decision – one focusing on whether to go (push), the other on where to go (pull). Pull factors are therefore concerned with the features of destinations and the particular attributes that attract people towards them.

In the interviews, people discussed a number of factors that motivated them to choose Dublin for a city break trip. These are discussed next in order of the prevalence in which they were mentioned.



### **6.3.2.1 Ease of Access and Cost**

When pull motives were examined in relation to city breaks, two factors in particular emerged as being crucial – ease of access and cost. The convenience with which people could get to Dublin - particularly from their local airport - and the cheap cost of the transport involved, were factors that proved extremely popular with respondents.

Both of these factors can be attributed, to a large extent, to what could be termed the ‘Ryanair effect.’ There is no doubt that the presence of Ryanair has had a significant impact on the success of Dublin as a city break destination:

*“It was cheaper to come here than what it is to go to my work, and it was quicker. I mean it takes me an hour-and-a-half to go to my work, whereas I mean I couldn’t believe it, it was 50 minutes. We left home at 7 a.m. in the morning and arrived here at 7.52 a.m. I mean it’s incredible, I couldn’t believe it for 70p each way - I mean that’s much less than I pay going to work. Although I know the taxes bring it up but still it’s amazing”* (Ruth, Glasgow).

More than two thirds of all respondents travelled to Dublin on a Ryanair flight and almost all of those lived within an hour or two of an airport served by Ryanair. This convenience was a crucial factor for many in the decision to come to Dublin. Some people for example specifically examined the low cost airline routes served by their nearest airport and made their destination choice on this basis:

*“It was basically anywhere where the low cost airfares travel companies flew to, from Newcastle airport”* (Chris, Newcastle).

Not surprisingly ease of access was particularly important for British city breakers. Its close proximity and the extensiveness of the flight network from Britain make Dublin one of the most accessible cities in Europe for British people. Qu & Li (1997) found a similar situation when researching travel patterns between mainland China and Hong Kong. Their findings showed that ease of access ranked as the most important attribute for mainland Chinese selecting Hong Kong as their travel destination.

Interestingly, the importance of ease of access and convenience was not really evident in relation to main holidays. Of much more relevance in that decision was the allure of sun, sand and sea. Such heliotropic tendencies are hardly surprising for main holidays given the family nature of most trips and the keen desire to relax while on holiday. There is also the fact that a main holiday is usually for a longer duration and therefore the weather has, in most cases, added importance for visitors. This was very evident in the following response:

*“I mean if you’ve just come for the weekend you can put up with a bit of drizzle and cold and what have you. But, I think if you’re planning a week’s holiday, your main holiday, and you’re spending upwards of a thousand pounds, you want to 99% guarantee the weather don’t you..?”* (John, Derbyshire).

#### **6.3.2.2 Fun Image**

The image of Dublin as a fun destination also proved to be a significant motive for some city breakers. They described the city as “lively” and commonly referred to it as having an upbeat atmosphere. Some respondents also mentioned the phenomenon of “having the craic” (having a good time) as an attractive characteristic of the city. Interestingly, for a number of people, the notion of fun was implicit in their perception of Dublin. In other words, they assumed the trip would be fun but did not express any particular details of the likely source of that fun.

#### **6.3.2.3 Pre-Arranged Event**

Another interesting pull factor for city breaks was the attraction of a pre-arranged event in the city. These events included:

- ❖ rugby matches (2),
- ❖ cultural exhibitions (2),
- ❖ concerts (2) and
- ❖ stag and hen parties (3).

In each of these cases the event was arranged outside the control of the respondent. Their decision ultimately concerned whether or not to take part. All respondents stated that the fact that the event was being held in Dublin added to the attractiveness of the trip:

*“Because it was in Dublin, it was a really special concert”* (Christina, Rotterdam).

However, in almost all cases, a trip to Dublin would probably not have occurred without the occurrence of the event at that particular time. This is consistent with Teare's (1994) findings where he discovered that one of the key primary motives for people taking a hotel leisure break was to coincide with attending a pre-arranged event. Again this motive was very specific to city breaks and did not figure in the results for the main holiday decision.

#### **6.3.2.4 *Physical Attributes***

An important insight to emerge in relation to Dublin's pull attributes was how the city's physical features failed to register in any significant way with respondents. Many of the city's principal sites such as its national cultural institutions, historic buildings and various tourist attractions rarely figured as being influential in the decision process. With the possible exception of the Guinness Storehouse, none of the city's physical attributes seemed to leave any indelible print on the minds of visitors, in the same way that the Eiffel Tower in Paris or Big Ben in London inevitably do. In fact, the motive 'tourist sites' ranked quite low overall in terms of its prevalence as a pull factor for city break visitors. On the other hand, factors that could be described as *intangible*, figured quite significantly in people's responses. Many visitors commented on the buoyant 'atmosphere' of Dublin, while others admitted to having a positive "feeling" for the city (although for many this was difficult to articulate). Consequently, although Dublin's physical attributes did not figure significantly as pull motives for people, the city seemed to engender a strong 'emotional' connection with visitors. It was these intangible attributes, therefore, that tended to act as the strongest pull factors for the city. The exact reasons behind this emotional connection are difficult to pinpoint. One explanation may lie in the way Dublin is marketed. The city is intentionally depicted as a fun and fashionable destination with a convivial and hospitable host population. There is also the connection with drink and merriment that is often associated with fun and exuberance, contributing to the general buzz of the city's atmosphere.

#### **6.3.3 *Situational Factors***

A final point that should be mentioned in relation to city break motivation relates to certain situational factors that occurred and which in some cases contributed significantly to the travel decision. As pointed out in Chapter 3, situational factors (occurrences that take place in a person's life particular to a time and place) can play an influential role in travel decisions. The following are examples of situational factors revealed in the city break decision:

- One respondent explained how a requirement to take time off work - he had accumulated days from the previous year and was in danger of losing them - had acted as the catalyst to look for ways to spend his leave.
- Another respondent found himself in a situation where he was between jobs and as such had free time on his hands; *“Well I’m between jobs at the moment, I haven’t been doing anything. So I decided to come here for a few days”* (Frank, Scotland).
- Receiving an unforeseen financial windfall proved to be a significant situational factor for another visitor. In this case, a tax refund presented the respondent with an unexpected opportunity to get away on a break that would otherwise not have been considered.

These findings highlight how influential situational factors can be in the decision making process. It also shows the complexity of decision making, particularly as situational factors can emanate from any aspect of a person’s life.

In summary, this section set out to investigate the motivation involved in taking a city break trip to Dublin. The findings indicate that the main push motives involved were, ‘escape,’ ‘socialising,’ and ‘self esteem (gift giving).’ City breaks were generally viewed as active or ‘doing’ holidays, with the ‘relaxation’ motive hardly registering at all as a reason to visit. Travelling parties were found to rarely consist of children, with many trips being specifically utilised as a break from parenting duties. The findings also show that, for city breaks, pull factors were extremely important in terms of the travel decision. In particular, factors such as, ease of access and, the availability of cheap flights, were not only influential in determining the destination, but also acted, in some cases, as the main stimulus to take the trip. There is little doubt that these two pull factors have contributed greatly to Dublin’s success in attracting city break visitors.

Finally, the results confirm the multi-motivational nature of travel decision making. Clear differences are evident between the motives for taking a city break and those for taking a main holiday. This shows that a person can purchase two different types of holidays with two different sets of motives – a point that is often overlooked by tourism marketers.

## 6.4 Information Search

The next stage of the travel decision to be examined relates to the search for information. As previously stated, information search activity forms an integral part of travel planning and usually has a significant impact on the overall purchase decision.

The examination of this part of the decision process will focus on two main areas that are commonly conceptualised in relation to the information search, namely, the *degree* and *direction* of the search. The degree concerns the extensiveness of the search and in particular, the number of sources used. The direction relates to the focus of the search, in terms of the emphasis or attention people placed on specific sources. In addition, this section will also comment on the *influence* of the different information sources and the *sequence* of search activity.

### 6.4.1 Degree of Information Search

When examining the data in relation to the degree of information search conducted by city breakers, one of the first noticeable findings concerns the narrow range of information sources consulted. The full list of these sources is outlined in Table 6.3 along with the frequency with which they were mentioned by respondents. In total, only 10 external sources were mentioned in the data, and of these, just three (Internet,  $n = 25$ ; Friends,  $n = 19$ ; Family,  $n = 14$ ), accounted for the majority of respondent's information sources.

**Table 6.3**  
**List of Information Sources in terms of Frequency Consulted**

Internet	25	Travel Agent	6	Work Colleagues	3
Friend	19	Newspaper	5	Tour Operator	2
Memory from Previous Visit	15	TIO / Fáilte Ireland	3	Brochure	2
Family	14	Guidebook	3		

In fact, if one combines the friends and family categories (as is the case in most studies), the information search becomes dominated by just two external sources. Overall the numbers consulted by respondents comes to an average of 2.5 sources. This is a relatively small figure, even for a trip such as a short city break to Dublin (Shul & Crompton, 1983).

Besides the external sources, the list in Table 6.3 also highlights internal sources in the decision making process. This is represented by the category labelled ‘memory from a previous visit’, and reflects the 15 respondents who had visited Dublin in the past. For these, recalling details of prior visits represented an important part of their information search. However, the results reveal an interesting finding in relation to the degree of information search employed by these repeat visitors. The literature would seem to suggest that repeat visitors use less sources of information as they already possess a significant knowledge of the destination’s characteristics (Snepenger et al., 1990; Bieger & Laesser 2004). However, the results from this research show repeat visitors employing just as much effort in the search for information as first time visitors – in fact, the average number of sources consulted per repeat visitors (2.7) is slightly more than the overall average (2.5). This may seem unusual given the prior knowledge of the destination which such visitors have. However, according to Gursoy & McCleary (2004), findings in this area have been contradictory. Although a number of researchers have concluded that there is a negative relationship between the amount of prior knowledge a person possesses and the amount of external information search he/she engages in, other researchers argue that prior product knowledge actually encourages information search by making it easier to process new information (Gursoy, 2003; Johnson & Russo, 1984; Rao & Sieben, 1992). For example, prior knowledge of Dublin may have allowed the individual to formulate more questions about the destination and, therefore, may have led to more information search. Another explanation may lie in the fact that, given the overall average is so low to begin with, and the repeat visitors have one source already at their disposal (memory), it is not difficult to see how they could match or even surpass the average number of search sources consulted.

In any case the results show city breakers, in general, to be low information searchers. This seems to reflect a common trend in contemporary trip taking and runs contrary to previous studies that have traditionally presented holidaymakers as high information searchers (Snepenger et al., 1990; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Certainly, Decrop & Snelders (2004)

found such a trend in their research findings of Belgian citizens planning a holiday - where the majority of informants were classified as 'low information searchers'.

#### **6.4.2 The Internet as an Information Search Tool**

The internet is certainly playing an important role in this general trend towards low, and in many cases, delayed or last minute information search behaviour. Previous decision models, particularly those older than 5 years, fail to reflect the importance and dominance which the internet currently plays in travel decision making, especially in terms of information gathering. The scope and scale of information which is currently available online to potential travellers has, in many cases, made the internet a 'one stop shop' for information seekers, thus eliminating the need to consult other more traditional information sources. Certainly, in this study the internet played a very significant role in the information search behaviour of city break visitors. It proved to be the most consulted information source with over 60% of respondents claiming to have used it during their decision making process. This backs up the findings from Phase One that also revealed the internet to be the most popular information source for city breakers.

#### **6.4.3 Direction of the Information Search**

These findings are indicative of the main *direction* and emphasis of city break visitor's search behaviour. Respondents were clearly attracted to the convenience that the internet offered:

*"Oh it was great. I must have visited hundreds of sites. There's so much there"* (Bea, Manchester).

This popularity with city breakers is consistent with Tjostheim & Tronvoll's (2002) study which found that city tourists had a stronger preference for the internet as an information source than non city tourists. The latter tended towards the more traditional sources such as travel agents and brochures. This gravitation towards the internet by city visitors is understandable when one considers the range and depth of information that it provides, particularly at short notice:

*"Well it's handy isn't it, you have it all there, and you don't have to leave the house. We certainly didn't have time to start collecting brochures and stuff"* (Lorna, London).

In order to better understand the usage of this information source, it proved useful to analyse the data under two main areas, namely, commercial and non-commercial internet sources. The commercial internet sources relates to those websites and information pages that were supplied by commercial organisations, trying to sell some travel and tourism service. These proved to be the most popular internet sources consulted by respondents (n=22) and included the websites of airlines, accommodation providers, tourist attractions and e-mediaries such as Expedia. The non-commercial internet sources proved less prevalent (n=10), but nonetheless significant. The search here regularly centred on the Dublin Tourism website, which proved very popular with respondents:

*“Well the internet was the main place we looked, we got a lot of information on the Dublin (Tourism) website, it was very good. It gave us most information about our trip”* (Phillipe, Paris).

This was a sentiment that was echoed by other respondents who used the Dublin Tourism website as a general information gathering source. It is important to note also that a number of respondents used both kinds of internet information, i.e. commercial and non-commercial. This is why the combined total of the two sources (32) is higher than the original internet usage figure (25).

Adapting Engel et al.'s (1995) consumer information matrix to widen the analysis further, we can see the full range of sources consulted by respondents presented under four different categories (Table 6.4). As well as categorising the information on the basis of commercial and non-commercial sources, this model also looks at whether or not the information was obtained in person. When analysed in this way, the results show that most respondents (n=36) leaned towards information sources that fall into the personal / non-commercial category. This category is made up of family, friends, and work colleagues and further emphasises the popularity of word of mouth information sources in the travel decision process. These sources played a particularly strong role in the city break decision. The model shows that the category least consulted by respondents was the personal/commercial grouping. This consists of traditional external sources such as travel agents and tour operators, and appears to be further evidence of the declining importance that such sources



seem to play in the information search behaviour of travellers, particularly city break travellers.

**Table 6.4**  
**The Consumer Information Matrix: Main Sources of Information**

	<i>Personal</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Non Personal</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>
<b>Commercial</b>	Travel Agent	6	Advertising	4
	Tour Operator	2	Internet	22
	TIO/Fáilte Ireland	3	Brochure	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Non-Commercial</b>	Friends	19	Guidebook	3
	Family	14	Internet	10
	Work Colleagues	3	Newspaper Article	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>
	Previous visit/memory	15		

*Source:* Adapted from Engel et al. (1995)

The results show that very few respondents (n=6) used a travel agent in their decision making. Most people believed they either possessed the necessary information themselves or could more easily find it somewhere else. Where a travel agent or tour operator was consulted, it usually involved situational factors that necessitated expert advice, guidance, or the assurance of a packaged trip. For example, in the case where the city break represented a couple's honeymoon, the need to consult a travel agent was seen as vital. In another case, a respondent's need for a guaranteed stress free break was triggered by a recent family bereavement. In both these cases the necessity to ensure an 'appropriate' trip was purchased proved to be central to the direction of the search.

The other two categories that make up the model are commercial / non-personal, and non-commercial/non-personal. The former represents information sources of a commercial nature but which don't involve any personal communication. This category ranks second in terms of the direction of the search by city break respondents. This was mostly due to the popularity of the internet as an information source, particularly in terms of providing information to potential city breakers regarding their transport and accommodation needs. As previously discussed, the websites of product providers such as Ryanair, Aer Lingus, Jurys, as well as e-mediaries such as Expedia and Hotels.com proved to be very popular with respondents. In addition to these websites, people also got information from other commercial sources including advertising (n=4) and brochures (n=2). In most cases the advertising consisted of people seeing a special deal that acted as the stimulus to investigate further the possibility of a trip to Dublin. In one case the advertising in itself, proved enough, i.e. the respondent did not need any more information:

*“There was a cheap flight, and I like Dublin ..., it was Ryanair, I saw it on a newspaper and my son booked it” (Frank, Scotland).*

The final category of non-commercial / non-personal is again dominated by the internet (n=10), however this time it relates to non-commercial websites and information sources. As mentioned, the Dublin Tourism website proved most popular in this category with the majority of the 10 internet users accessing this site. Guidebooks (n=3), and one newspaper article make up the remainder in this category. The guidebooks tended to be consulted later in the search when the decision to go to Dublin had already been made, and they continued to be consulted on an ongoing basis throughout the trip at the destination.

The consumer information matrix provided an interesting insight into the direction of the information search of city break visitors, however it did not give insight into how influential each source was, in terms of the decision to visit Dublin. This issue of information source influence is addressed next.

#### **6.4.4 Influence of Information Source on Travel Decision**

During the interviews, respondents were asked to comment on the information source that had the most influence on their travel decision. The objective here was to try to identify if there was a particular source that proved especially significant with city break travellers. The findings are listed in Table 6.5, which shows the information source friends and family to be the most influential in terms of the city break decision. This high ranking generally stems from the perception of friends and family sources as impartial and reliable. This is consistent with Bieger & Laesser (2004) who found that travellers make intensive use of ‘trustworthy’ information sources. For first time visitors to Dublin, this was important as they felt safer visiting a destination that had been recommended by someone they knew. This is reflected in the findings where 17 out of the 25 first time visitors to Dublin, cited either friends or family as the most influential information source for their visit.

**Table 6.5**  
**Information Source with Main Influence on Travel Decision**

1. Friends (10)
2. Family (9)
3. Prior Knowledge / Previous visit (8)
4. Internet (7)
5. Advertising (3)
6. Travel Agent (2)
7. Tour Operator (1)

##### **6.4.4.1 Friends**

Overall, friends ranked first on the list, and in many cases these friends formed part of the travelling party and often played an important role in the organising of the actual city break trip. This is evident from the following response:

*“Most of the trips we’ve been on have been Mike, our friend’s - he puts the trips together, basically going to one destination and not having to pack and unpack and move and keep moving every couple of days - he was putting this trip together, and we just jumped on board”* (Jeff, US).

A similar situation was also evident with some of the trips relating to organised events such as stag parties, rugby games and concerts. Many respondents on these breaks were heavily influenced by the main organiser of the trip:

*“It was all done by our mate Steve, the best man. He organised it all, he suggested the idea, so we all dealt with him, and he did all the bookings”* (Darren, Birmingham).

#### **6.4.4.2 Family**

Family members were the second most influential information source. The close proximity and reliability of such sources proved very significant for respondents. The findings show all members of the family unit were utilised for information gathering purposes, i.e. partners, parents, children and siblings. These family information sources not only influenced the decision to travel to Dublin but in some instances they also influenced the activities engaged in at the destination. This is evident from the following respondent whose sons had been to Dublin previously and had advised him about where to go:

*“They said go to Temple Bar for the nightlife, they said go into the town and there is always good food on and a session with a banjo and a guitar playing,...and the shops, he said there were some good shops”* (John, Derbyshire).

#### **6.6.4.3 Memory**

Following just behind family, the third most influential information source was people’s memory from a previous visit. As discussed, the prior knowledge gained from an earlier visit to Dublin did not minimise the information search behaviour of these respondents. However, for most of these (n=8), the memory of the prior visit proved to be the most influential information source in terms of the overall travel decision. In fact, because there were only 15 repeat visitors in total, memory from a previous visit could possibly be seen, proportionately,

as the most influential information source. In general the findings show a very positive perception of Dublin from all repeat visitors. Some were on their second visit to the city, others had been a number of times. For all, the memory of a previous visit was a significant factor in their decision to come again. As Gursoy & McCleary (2004) point out, prior product knowledge facilitates easier and more efficient processing of information because knowledgeable consumers are able to focus on those pieces of information that are relevant to the decision at hand (Johnson & Russo, 1984; Rao & Sieben, 1992). The importance of prior knowledge from a previous visit is obvious from the following response;

*“I’ve been to Dublin lots of times, so it just makes it easier when you know where you are going and you know where things are, particularly when it’s just for a few days”* (Thomas, Paris).

#### **6.4.4.4 Internet**

The internet comes next on the list of influential sources, just behind friends, family and memory from a previous visit. This is interesting considering it ranked first as the most consulted information source. It would seem indicate also, that the most commonly referred to and consulted information source is not always the most influential one, in terms of the actual decision to travel. Nonetheless, a significant number of respondents (n=7) still rated the internet as the most influential source in their travel decision. The majority of these had been swayed by the allure of cheap flights and special deals, which the internet allowed them to access. The following response typically highlights this. When asked which information source was the most influential in his travel decision, the respondent replied;

*“It would be a combination between the internet and the guidebook, because the internet was the deciding factor on the price and the guidebook sort of pinpointed exactly where to stay”* (Chris, Newcastle).

This shows how different sources can influence different aspects of the travel decision. Some sources are important in helping people with the generic decision of whether or not to take the trip, while others are useful with specific aspects of the decision such as where to stay or what to do at the destination.

The remaining information sources; advertising, travel agents, and tour operators, fill out the rest of the places on the list with their incidence showing them to have a much less influential role on the travel decision in general. Advertising, consisted of three respondents who had been influenced (n=3) by special flight deals which they saw in newspapers or magazines. Travel agents and tour operators proved influential for a further few respondents who were coming to Dublin for the first time and required assurance and guidance.

#### **6.4.5 *Timing and Sequence of the Search***

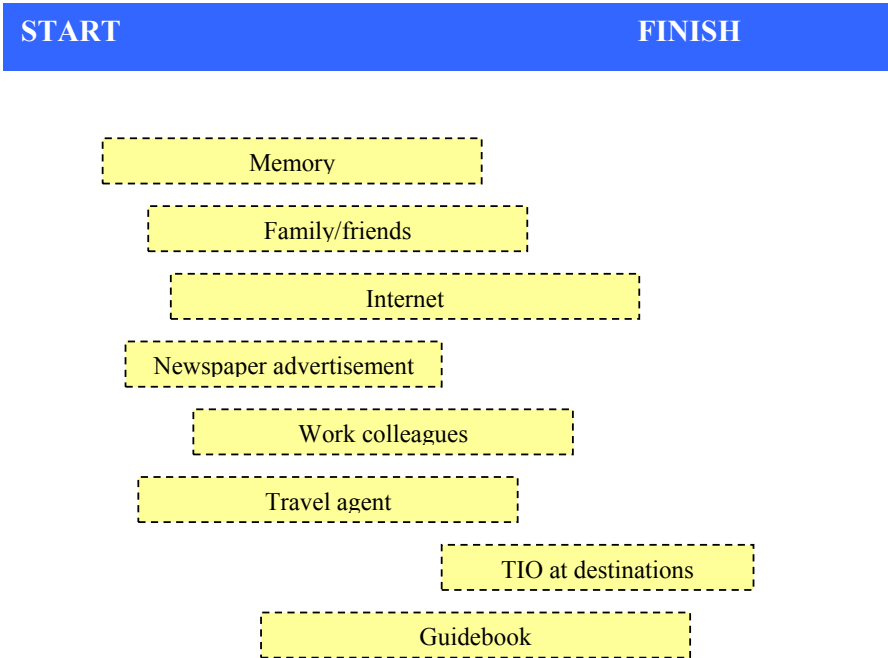
The final aspect of the information search analysis focuses on the sequence of the search. The objective of this section is to gain a better understanding of when, and in what order, city breakers consulted the various information sources utilised in their travel decision. To this end, during the course of the interviews the respondents were not only questioned on the range and direction of their search, but also on the sequence of that search.

It is important to point out, at this point, that not all information fulfils a similar role for travellers. A distinction needs to be made between information that contributed to the generic decision, such as, whether or not to take a break, and, information that aided in decisions more specific to the destination, such as, where to stay, where to eat, and what activities to do. Most information search behaviour follows a pattern where this distinction is evident, i.e. earlier information sources tend to relate to the generic travel decision while later information sources are associated with more specific destination decisions. The findings here show a similar pattern with certain information sources showing more prevalence with respondents in relation to the initial decision to take a city break in Dublin, while others were utilised more at a later stage in the search when the specifics of the trip needed to be decided.

The results indicate advice from friends and relatives, along with memory from previous visits to the city, were commonly used as sources earlier in the search - while guidebooks and travel intermediaries tended to be used later on. Figure 6.1 shows the positioning of the various information sources in relation to where they were mostly consulted during the

information search process. As one would expect, for those people who had been to Dublin before, the information search begins with an internal search. Memories from a previous visit were drawn on and in some cases these were enough to help make the initial travel decision. However, all the respondents who had previously visited engaged in further external information searching.

**Figure 6.1**  
**The Positioning of Sources in the Information Search Process**



For those with no previous experience of Dublin, the initial information tended to come from friends and family. This information helped with both the initial travel decision and subsequent decisions such as where to stay and what to do. Friends and family were particularly important at the initial stages, where recommendation or endorsement from such a ‘trustworthy’ source proved crucial for many respondents. Although the internet was utilised throughout the information search process the findings indicate that it was often not the first source consulted. Typically people would have had some inclination to take a trip before consulting the internet, usually this would have come from friends or family, knowledge from a previous visit, or in some cases an advertisement offering a special deal. The following response typifies this information search sequencing;

*“He (friend) had suggested Dublin – said it was a great city, and I should go, so it was he really who put me onto the idea. And from that really I just went on the internet to see if there were any good deals around and yeah, I found a good flight, and a decent hotel and that was it” (Ian, Cardiff).*

As mentioned, the internet proved to be the most commonly consulted information source mainly because of its convenience and versatility. As well as finding out about flights, accommodation, and activities in Dublin, people also used it for checking weather conditions, accessing maps and getting theatre listings. The fact that people could access this information from their own homes or work desks, added to the convenience. It is not surprising therefore that the internet was utilised throughout the search process right up to the time of departure.

Some information sources were also utilised after departure and in some cases these proved very significant. Guidebooks and the tourist information office, for example, helped some people with holiday decisions such as where to visit and even where to stay, after arriving in Dublin. This was a common theme in the findings and possibly indicates the last minute nature of city break travel where prior information gathering is not as extensive compared to other trips. Certainly, the tourist information office (TIO) in Dublin proved particularly useful for a number of respondents who had arrived without any pre-booked accommodation;

*“Well I tried to get a hostel, the International, but it was fully booked. So I got the bus in from the airport and I found a tourist information office on O’Connell Street and they showed me where to go” (Frank, Scotland).*

In addition to the TIO and guidebooks a number of people consulted material about Dublin which they had collected themselves and which they brought with them for reference. Most of this material was downloaded from the internet and in some cases substituted as a guidebook, which some city breakers may have seen as an unnecessary purchase for such a short trip. This material was frequently consulted to help people plan or check their itineraries. In their research, Decrop & Snelders (2004), also comment on similar ‘documentation’ being brought by Belgian tourists to their destinations and how this was consulted and discussed every day during breakfast or after dinner.



In relation to the usage of intermediaries such as travel agents and tour operators, the data shows varied findings. In some cases travel agents were consulted at the start of the process, in an attempt to seek guidance in relation to an appropriate destination to visit. In other cases the destination had already been decided and the travel agent was being utilised to secure the booking and provide more destination specific information. In all these cases however the need for security and risk reduction was important to the traveller.

In general, no definite sequencing patterns are evident in the search behaviour of city breakers. Much of the responses indicate that information was gathered incidentally and on an ad hoc basis, rather than systematically. However, certain distinctions are apparent in relation to the timing of much of the search behaviour. For example, the earlier stages of the information search tend to be dominated by sources that help with the initial generic travel decision, such as friends and family, memory from previous visits, or special offer advertisements in the media. In addition, the internet is evident throughout the search process and is consulted in some cases many times during the decision process. Finally, sources such as guidebooks and the tourist information offices tended to dominate towards the end of the search process.

## **6.5 Trip Planning and Level of Involvement**

Having examined the information search behaviour of city break tourists to Dublin from the point of view of *degree*, *direction*, *influence*, and *sequence*, the focus now turns to the overall planning of the trip and the level of involvement concerned. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the results here involve a comparison between respondents city break trip and their last main holiday - similar to the approach taken with travel motives previously. This comparative analysis centres on responses to interview questions which asked people to compare the amount of planning and effort they engaged in for their city break with that for their last main holiday. Snepenger et al. (1990) identified several commonalities regarding information acquisition in the literature and pointed out that the major factors that influence the amount of search effort made by travellers include:

- 1) the composition of the travelling party,
- 2) the presence of family and friends at the destination,

- 3) prior visits to the destination, and
- 4) the degree of novelty associated with the destination.

These factors do figure, to varying degrees, in the findings of this research.

The data reveals that the majority of respondents (n=24) showed a higher degree of involvement for their last main holiday compared to their city break. When asked why the main holiday received more attention in terms of planning and researching, four main reasons emerged from the data (see Table 6.6). The first related to the travel party and in particular the presence of children.

**Table 6.6**  
**Reasons for High Involvement in Main Holiday**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Total</b>
Family / Children focus holiday	9
Bigger / Expensive trip	6
Less familiar destination	6
More complex holiday	3
<i><b>Total</b></i>	<i><b>24</b></i>

#### **6.5.1 Children and City Break Travel**

As highlighted previously, city breaks to Dublin rarely involved children. Indeed, many people in this research used the city break as an escape from the pressures of parenting. This was not the case for their main holiday where the emphasis was on enjoying a family holiday together and developing family bonds - what Crompton (1979) refers to as 'enhancement of kinship relationships.' In many cases the main holiday was planned with family, and in particular, children's needs in mind. This resulted in more research being employed, often over a longer decision period. City breaks, on the other hand, tended to be centered on adults and were often decided in a much shorter timescale. This is reflected in the following reply which a respondent gave when asked to compare the city break and his last main holiday, in terms of planning and effort;

*“I would say that this (city break) was more last minute and it was more condensed sort of, obviously because of the time factor, where we said right we’re going to Dublin - had a look on the internet, the price was right, booked it and then decided on where we were going to stay. So it was more spontaneous, whereas with the main holiday, obviously we’re taking our daughter, so it requires a bit more planning because it’s based around her, whereas the short break was based around us,”* (Chris, Newcastle).

This response shows how the city break trip was seen as an adult focused holiday and therefore could be decided on spontaneously without too much planning or effort. The main holiday however was perceived differently - as the participation of his child meant the respondent had to think more about her requirements and to ensure that a suitable destination was chosen with appropriate child friendly facilities. This was a common theme with a number of respondents who felt that their decision making effort was different in a family setting. This chiefly related to the increased risk which people perceived when children were part of the trip. In some cases this risk related to personal safety issues but mostly it related to emotional peace of mind, or as one respondent put it *‘when the kids are happy, we are happy.’* In the case of city breaks, because they were mostly childless trips, this risk element was not a feature and therefore more impulsive decision making behaviour was evident.

### **6.5.2 Size and Expense of Trip**

The second major reason for respondents showing a more involved decision making pattern towards their main holiday related to the size and expense of the trip. Generally, most main holidays were larger and more expensive than the corresponding city breaks. This is hardly surprising given the longer durations and more distant destinations usually involved. Therefore for main holidays, people showed more awareness of the increased financial risk involved in such a purchase. This is evident in the following statement from a respondent who was commenting on the degree of effort she puts into the holiday decision;

*“But normally when we are going away, I normally do research quite a lot about where we are going, because I think when you are paying a lot of money or any money really, to go somewhere else, you don’t want to be disappointed, you know, you want value for money”* (Pam, Birmingham).

According to Bieger & Laesser (2004) this fear of economic risk often leads to high investments of time, effort and resources in customer decision making.

### **6.5.3 Destination Familiarisation**

The third reason for increased involvement in the main holiday decision concerns the lack of awareness that people had of the destination. Many described their last main holiday as less familiar to them and this contributed to their increased search effort during decision making. This lack of familiarity was due mainly to a couple of factors. Firstly, many respondents had not visited their last main holiday destination before, and as such it represented a novel travel experience for them. This was in contrast to Dublin, which most people were more familiar with and in a number of cases had visited before. In addition, many of the main holiday destinations were geographically further away than Dublin and therefore less familiar in a cultural context;

*“Well it’s a different type of place, isn’t it (Sardinia)? The food is different, the culture is different, the language is different - it’s a different kettle of fish to this trip. You’re not just going to land there without doing some homework” (Dan, Guildford).*

### **6.5.4 Complexity of the Trip**

The last major reason given for higher involvement in the main holiday decision, relates to the complexity of the trip. Main holidays were generally perceived to be more complex trips, especially compared to city breaks which mostly consisted of just two elements - flight and accommodation. In contrast, main holidays commonly had other components such as excursions, car rental, and activities, all of which added to the complexity of the holiday product. This point is highlighted in the following comment where a respondent compares a recent main holiday in Estonia to the city break;

*“I went to Estonia recently, and Estonia is very different from a city break – it’s a very complex trip.... a city break has less parts and so they are easier to manage, but long breaks have more parts and activities so they require more time in the planning” (Michael, UK).*

It is clear that the more parts or components involved in a trip, the more complicated it becomes for the traveller and the more attention it requires. Many people try to overcome the

risks involved with such complicated trips by buying packaged products through a travel agent.

#### **6.5.5 Risk Reduction**

In general, the reduction of risk is seen as key to the level of holiday involvement by travellers (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). As the above findings show, it is the attempt by respondents to minimise these risks that is central to the degree of planning and effort that is put into the travel decision. For most respondents this degree of risk was perceived to be less in the case of their city break to Dublin. As mentioned, the absence of children from city break trips was an important aspect of this – however, the findings show that low involvement behaviour was also evident with people who were travelling with friends, particularly where there was a group leader involved. In such cases some respondents travelled to Dublin having done little or no information search, deciding instead to rely on the group leader for guidance and direction. This was particularly evident with stag and hen parties where many members of such travelling groups had little prior knowledge of the destination beyond basic awareness of pubs and entertainment. Indeed, this lack of preparation was highlighted a number of times during the course of the interviews when respondents asked for advice on where to go or things to see in Dublin.

#### **6.5.6 Low Involvement in Main Holiday Decision**

Although most respondents claimed their main holiday was a higher involved travel decision, a significant number (n=12) still found this not to be the case. For these people, the amount of effort and planning that went into the main holiday was either equal to or less than that for their city break. The main reasons for this lack of involvement in the main holiday decision are highlighted in Table 6.7.

**Table 6.7**  
**Reasons for Equal/Less Involvement for Main Holiday**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Total</b>
Bought Package through Travel agent	6
Repeat visit to main holiday destination	3
Same approach used	3
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>12</i></b>

*Note:* For some respondents (n=4), a comparison could not be made between the city break and their last main holiday, in terms of level of involvement.

The first of these relates to the utilisation by some respondents of package holidays. As previously mentioned, the purchase of packaged products and the usage of travel agents is a common risk reduction activity associated with the travel decision. This reduction of risk subsequently lessens the need for more involvement. For many, the travel agent acts as a one-stop shop in terms of both information gathering and booking, which can be quite advantageous in terms of convenience. Interestingly, a number of respondents claimed that a trip to the travel agent for their main holiday proved a lot less complex and less time consuming than the ‘Do It Yourself’ approach they adopted for the city break. This is an important point to note as it shows that not everyone who booked a city break to Dublin by themselves found it entailed little effort or low involvement. For some, the searching of the internet for flights and accommodation proved quite time consuming. By contrast, a visit to a travel agent for the main holiday purchase was seen as convenient and time efficient. This can be seen in the following comment from a respondent when she was asked about the degree of involvement in her last main holiday decision;

*“I guess that was a package holiday, so it was all together, we didn’t have to go searching for flights and stuff. We booked it all together in a travel agent. ...well, it’s just more convenient, isn’t it?”* (Joyce, Essex).

Another reason cited for lower involvement in the main holiday decision was familiarity with the destination. This was mainly due to respondents visiting a destination they had been to before and were accustomed to. In some cases these main holidays consisted of packaged sun products and therefore held few surprises. Such products mostly relate to what Holloway (1998) calls 'identikit' destinations, that is, destinations and resorts that conform to a similar formula of sun, sea, and sand, with little to differentiate one from the other. Such holidays have guaranteed mass demand where tourists find a comforting degree of uniformity and therefore perceive little risk, even where children are involved;

*"Well the Spain trip was just a regular sun holiday so we didn't really think too much about it - I mean we've been on those holidays lots of times. We just wanted a break in the sun - it didn't really matter where. So we went to the travel agent and chose one of the ones he suggested...With this break (Dublin) it was a bit different. We didn't use a travel agent, I did it myself but I spent a lot of time on the net - working out where to go and stuff, and trying to get the best deal"* (Bea, Manchester).

In a few cases, there were certain situational factors that contributed to the main holiday being a less involved decision. In one example, the respondent was the group leader for a hen party and as such had added responsibility and pressure compared to other members of the group. This meant that the city break for her was a much more involved decision compared to her last main holiday, even though the latter was a family trip involving children.

Interestingly, a number of respondents claimed they use the same decision making approach regardless of the type of holiday. Usually this was a low involvement approach where respondents tend to leave things to the last minute and choose whatever holiday seems appropriate at the time. When probed on this issue a number of people just put this behaviour down to the way they like to do things. In other words, it was a kind of personality trait where people didn't like to procrastinate and tended to make decisions quite quickly.

In conclusion, we can see that, overall, the level of involvement does differ according to the type of holiday a person chooses - with the majority of respondents showing a lower level of involvement for their city break compared to their last main holiday. However, it is important to note, for a significant number of people, the main holiday represented a low involvement decision as well.

## 6.6 Alternative Evaluation and Decision Strategies

The next stage of the decision process deals with how people chose between the different holiday alternatives. Hawkins et al. (1995) suggest that consumers need the following types of information in order to make decisions:

- The existence of various solution alternatives
- The appropriate evaluative criteria for the solution of a problem
- The characteristics of each alternative on each of the evaluative criteria

The following section analyses the findings in relation to the alternatives considered by city break visitors, the criteria they used to evaluate those alternatives and the decision strategies they employed in making a final choice.

### 6.6.1 *Weighing up the Alternatives*

One of the most interesting findings from the data relates to the large number of people who did not consider any other destination except Dublin during their decision process. The majority (n=23) of respondents sought no alternative to Dublin, with just 17 contemplating a different holiday destination. Three main themes emerged to explain why people did not seek or consider any alternatives. Firstly, for a number of respondents, the trip had a certain pre-arranged element to it such as a rugby match, concert, stag or hen party. In most situations the respondent was approached by friends or family and asked if they would like to travel to the particular pre-arranged event in Dublin. Thus, the decision in most cases was reduced to a simple ‘will I join this trip or not?’ with no alternative destination being considered. If the event was not happening in Dublin they probably would not have taken the city break at that time. The following comment by a rugby supporter highlights this;

*“No, we didn’t look at anywhere else. I mean we came primarily for the game, so if that wasn’t on we probably wouldn’t be here now” (Ali, England).*

The second main reason for no alternatives being considered relates to the impulsive nature of the decision. For some people the choice to come to Dublin was a spontaneous one,



influenced mostly by the availability of cheap flights. This was especially the case for people who had few ties, particularly in relation to children;

*“I saw the special offer for the flight and that I suppose started me thinking. And then because we had free time and no real commitments we decided why not”* (Fred, Bristol).

The third reason for people not considering any other alternative emanated from a strong inherent desire to visit Dublin. Family links and positive word of mouth were the main stimuli for this desire to visit. In one example, nostalgia played an important part, where a daughter treated her parents to a city break to Dublin to mark their wedding anniversary. For her, it was always going to be Dublin because the city was where her parents had originally come on honeymoon 40 years previously. Some respondents spoke of a long-standing wish to visit the city, while others who had been before were very keen to return;

*“We all wanted to come to Dublin. This was kind of the destination, it wasn’t, we wanted to get away just anywhere ... the reason we came away was to come to Dublin”* (Ben, London).

### **6.6.2 Alternatives to Dublin**

For those respondents who *did* consider other destinations (n=17) the number and range of alternatives turned out to be quite small. The findings show that, in total, just 13 alternative destinations were considered by all respondents (Table 6.8) and of these, three in particular featured prominently - Prague, Amsterdam and Glasgow. Interestingly, Ireland’s second city Cork, was only mentioned twice as an alternative. This highlights the fact that few people viewed their city break decision in the context of coming to Ireland, and choosing between Ireland’s main cities. Where Cork was considered, access proved to be an obstacle, with respondents being unable to get to the city at the time of year they wanted. It’s worth noting that all the alternatives listed in Table 6.8 are cities with the exception of Donegal and Cornwall. It shows that a city break seems to have been clearly in people’s minds from the outset. In other words, the decision to take a *city* break was first taken and then it was a case of ‘which city?’

**Table 6.8**  
**Alternative Destinations Considered**

Prague	5
Amsterdam	5
Glasgow	4
Cork	2
London	2
Budapest	2
Galway	1
Donegal	1
Manchester	1
Barcelona	1
Paris	1
New York	1
Cornwall	1

No sun destination, for example, was considered as an alternative to Dublin. Such destinations were not perceived as being appropriate for the requirements of what was in most cases a discretionary short break. Moreover, the reasons for visiting sun climates, as pointed out in the motives section previously, tended to relate to rest and relaxation, however the people who visited Dublin were focused more on activities and doing things.

### **6.6.3 City Break Consideration Sets**

Because of the large number of respondents who did not consider any alternatives to Dublin, the formation of a consideration set was not applicable in most cases. The consideration set consists of the relevant subset of brands from which ultimate choice is made (Brown & Wilt, 1992). For 23 respondents in this study no such subset of brands was formed before purchasing. For the 17 people who *did* consider alternatives, the consideration sets involved tended to be generally small in size. Most consisted of just one or two alternatives along with Dublin. Table 6.9 shows the findings in relation to the breakdown of set size. Interestingly, the average consideration set size for all respondents works out at 1.67. This is a very low figure and indicates how little evaluation was undertaken in general.

**Table 6.9**  
**Consideration Set Size for City Break to Dublin**

<i>1 (Dublin only)</i>	<i>2 Destinations</i>	<i>3 Destinations</i>	<i>4 Destinations</i>
<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Previous research into consideration (or evoked) set size generally shows greater choice options being considered. However these studies are difficult to compare, mainly because of the differences in the definitions and wording used. Woodside & Lysonski (1989) for example, found an average consideration set size of 4.2 in their study of New Zealand students. However, the wording they used to ascertain the respondent's consideration set involved asking students to "think about countries to visit on a holiday." By contrast, Um & Crompton (1992, p.20) carried out a longitudinal study of American students in which they collected data in two stages. In the later stage they asked students to "write down the name of places which you have selected for your vacation trip this summer... and please list other out-of-state or foreign places which were close to being selected before you made your final selection decision." We can see from this that the data collection approach differs greatly and as such, comparisons are difficult.

However, by any measure, the consideration set size, for city break visitors to Dublin was small and seems to show further evidence of the low level of involvement that is apparent in the city break travel decision. This is in contrast to much of the existing research into travel decision making which frequently shows extensive problem solving behaviour involving numerous alternatives being considered. Um & Crompton's study for example, describes holiday destination choice as a three-stage sequential decision consisting of an early evoked set, a late evoked set, and a final destination decision. Others have conceptualised it in a similar hierarchical format (Woodside & Ronkainen 1980; Woodside & Lysonski 1989; Goodall, 1991). Goodall uses slightly different labels on some of the stages of decision making but still follows the same funnelling approach advocated by the others. Importantly however, he does state that "main holidays are better planned than second or subsidiary ones." This is a crucial point as most of the studies on choice sets fail to highlight the fact that consideration set size and the selection process in general can differ according to the type of

trip being taken. Many of the studies for example, only take the summer vacation as the basis for their research (Um & Crompton, 1992; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). The type of holiday (city break, main summer holiday etc.), is rarely pointed out as being an influencing factor in the choice set process. This seems rather remiss, as the findings from this research indicate that type of holiday can be a very significant factor in this regard. The limited problem solving behaviour of city break visitors to Dublin (reflected in their small average consideration set size) provides evidence of this.

#### **6.6.4 Evaluative Criteria Utilised**

In order to analyse the decision strategies utilised by city break visitors to Dublin, it was necessary to firstly find out the criteria they used in making their destination choice. During the interviews, respondents were questioned on the reasons why they chose Dublin over alternative destinations. The results are illustrated in Table 6.10. This list is similar to the evaluative attributes found in other studies (Fisher & Price, 1991; Corey, 1996; Dann, 1996). However the ranking and salience of the different attributes tends to differ from study to study. In the case of the city break decision, attributes relating to cost and easy access were particularly salient.

**Table 6.10**  
**Evaluation Criteria for City Break**

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>No</i>
1	Cost	10
2	Ease of Access	6
3	Fun /Lively	4
4	Atmosphere	3
5	Shopping	2
5	Positive image	2
5	Family Link	2
8	Different (prestige)	1
8	Friendly	1
8	Language	1

#### **6.6.4.1 Cost Attribute**

One can see from the table that cost was by far the most frequently cited (n=10) point of evaluation. This related mostly to transport costs but in some cases also included accommodation. Generally, the cost of a city break to Dublin compared favourably with its main competitors Prague, Amsterdam and Glasgow which can be seen in the following response;

*“I’ve always wanted to come to Dublin but at first we actually looked at Prague. I had a few days off work, and I was looking at the prices of Prague and they had gone up. And then we thought what about Dublin, and that’s how it came about, ...it was more reasonable for two nights in Dublin than what it was to go to Prague”* (Chris, Newcastle).

There is no doubt that low cost air access has contributed greatly to the success of Dublin as a city break destination. Cheap flights were highlighted again and again as being a crucial factor in the decision to come to Dublin. Even for people who did not consider an alternative destination, the availability of a low cost flight often proved the main reason in the generic decision to take the trip.

#### **6.6.4.2 Ease of Access Attribute**

The second most commonly cited criteria for choosing Dublin was ease of access. This related to the ease with which people could get to the city both in terms of time (quick access) and convenience (hassle free). The plethora of new routes that have developed over the past number of years have made Dublin one of the most accessible cities in Europe by air. This has resulted in more point to point flights, a factor very important for the time pressed city break visitor. In some cases it proved easier and more convenient for UK visitors to take an international flight to Dublin than a domestic break at home. This can be seen from the following dialogue;

Dave: *“Well we could be here quicker than going to Glasgow. It’s a five hour drive or a one hour flight.”*

Interviewer: *“But you could have flown there (Glasgow) couldn’t you?”*

Dave: *“No, not from where we are”* (Leeds Bradford).

As well as showing the inconvenience of a long drive, this also highlights the importance of a direct flight originating near ones residence. A number of respondents admitted their preference for destinations that were served by airports located near their homes. This is further explored in the decision rules section later.

#### **6.6.4.3 *Attractiveness of the City Attribute***

A number of other factors that proved important as choice criteria related to the attractiveness and liveliness of the city for visitors. Factors such as the city's fun image, its atmosphere, and its shopping proved decisive for a number of respondents. This is reflected in the following response from a hen party member;

*“We sort of considered Amsterdam for a while but we realised that most people wanted to go to Dublin...I don't know, people just felt it would be good fun here, they knew it was lively and a bit different I suppose. We also wanted to check out the shopping”* (Lindsey, Manchester).

These criteria proved the most common for respondents in making their city break holiday decision. The focus will now turn to the specific rules or heuristics that they employed in making their travel choice.

#### **6.6.5 *Decision Rules***

As Bettman (1979) points out, most consumers have limited processing capacity - hence, comparisons among alternatives are usually made by applying some basic decision rules, or heuristics. Such rules are a way of simplifying the choice task and adapting to limitations in processing capacity. For this research, different types of heuristics, as highlighted in the literature review, were analysed in terms of their relevance in the city break decision. The findings reveal both compensatory and non-compensatory rules were employed.

##### **6.6.5.1 *Compensatory Decision Rules***

Compensatory refers to situations where a trade-off strategy (Park & Lutz, 1982) was employed by respondents, in that a weakness in one choice attribute was compensated by a strength in another one. Mostly the trade-off involved the two most commonly cited attributes, cost and ease of access. In terms of cost, for many people (particularly UK

residents), a city break to Dublin represented good value compared to other, possibly more desired destinations;

*“Originally we were thinking about New York, and my sister was going to come as well, but in the end we couldn’t afford it, so we decided we’d come here and leave going to New York for another time”* (Diane, London).

This cost factor is a very common trade-off attribute frequently found in other studies as well. Decrop & Snelders (2004) for example, found that ‘spending money well’ was an important factor, which respondents defined as a good quality/price ratio, climate/price ratio, destination/price, or time/ price ratio.

In some cases, Dublin was chosen over alternatives for very practical reasons. For example, one respondent who was part of a stag party stated that Dublin was picked over Prague for the simple reason most people wanted to go there. In other words, the organiser (and ultimate decision maker) realised if he picked Prague the numbers would drop significantly. Therefore, in order to ensure maximum participation in the stag party, he opted for Dublin over the more unusual destination of Prague.

#### **6.6.5.2 Non-Compensatory Decision Rules**

Non-compensatory decision rules were also evident in the city break travel decision. For example, a number of respondents disregarded unacceptable alternatives to Dublin based on one or more criteria. This follows the *elimination by aspect* heuristic, where a cut-off level for the most important attribute is determined, and all alternatives not having satisfactory values for that selected aspect are eliminated. The most common example of this involved people who excluded all destinations that were not served by their local airport. Only those destinations exceeding this cut-off point were considered acceptable and subsequently evaluated on the second most important point. Such a decision strategy is evident in the following response;

*“Well I was adamant I was leaving from Manchester, so only places that I could get to from there were thought of. So that narrowed it to Amsterdam, Prague and Dublin. And really it just came down to cost. The Dublin flight was just so cheap compared to the others. That’s probably what swung it”* (Bea, Manchester).

The *lexicographic heuristic* was also evident. This is where respondents prioritised attributes in terms of significance and then compared alternatives with respect to the most important attribute. In many cases the most important attribute was price, with Dublin being picked by a number of respondents because of its strength in this aspect. As Bettmann (1979) points out a “buy the cheapest” approach is typical in the lexicographic decision rule. The cheapest in most cases related to flight costs and not necessarily the overall cost of the trip. One respondent managed to get a flight to Dublin for just 17p before taxes and charges. When asked if she would have chosen Dublin if the flight was €100, she replied, “probably not.” This highlights again just how important cheap air access is for a destination like Dublin.

#### **6.6.6 No Alternatives Considered**

Although the above findings show some clearly defined heuristics being employed in the decision to visit Dublin, it is important to note that for the majority of respondents, no alternative was considered. In these situations a more simplified decision strategy was evident. In many cases this was characterised by opportunistic and spontaneous decision making. Unforeseen circumstances such as the sudden awareness of cheap flights or special offers, the suggestion from friends to join a trip, and the discovery of an interesting event in the city, all contributed to decision making which required a quick response. In such cases the alternative was ‘not to go.’ In one situation a respondent decided to come to Dublin following a chance conversation with a work colleague who suggested it;

*“Well how it came about was, my friend at work and me was talking one day, about a month ago, and he said he was going to Dublin with a mate and just asked would I be interested. I said yeah, I’d be up for it. And here I am”* (Joe, London).

In a couple of cases the necessity to use up holiday entitlements or face losing them was a key stimulus for taking the holiday to Dublin, which otherwise may not have been considered. Another respondent spoke about a small unexpected windfall which he received, and decided to use it by treating himself to a trip to Dublin. Prior to receiving this money he had no intention of taking such a trip. Interestingly, when holidays are considered following such unforeseen circumstances, city breaks tend to be viewed quite favourably as travel options. This is mainly because such trips are generally uncomplicated and can be undertaken at short notice compared with other types of holidays. Consequently, they tend to suit people



who are prone to spontaneous travel decision making. For example, when asked why he only takes short breaks, one respondent gave the following reply;

*“I don’t think about it too long before. I just take it as it comes. I don’t plan it too much. If I feel like a break I’ll just go. Every now and again I feel like getting away, and I may ask a mate do you fancy it or I may just decide to go by myself. This time I had some free time because I’m between jobs. If I have the time and somewhere looks good I’ll just go. You can throw a few things in a bag and away you go”* (Frank, Glasgow).

Such spontaneity was typical of a number of people’s decision making in this research.

## **6.7 Purchase Behaviour**

The next stage of the decision making process relates to the actual purchase of the holiday product. This is a crucial stage for the consumer, as it marks the point in the travel decision where significant commitment is made on behalf of the consumer towards the travel product. Prior to this, consumers would have only shown interest or desire - however with the actual purchase act, the consumer is essentially making a commitment to the product provider and the relationship between consumer and product provider moves onto a different level. There are various aspects to the travel purchase act and it is useful to examine each in order to get a better understanding of the purchaser and his/her decision behaviour.

### **6.7.1 Aspects of the Purchase Act**

The findings with regard to the city break purchase act are examined under four main aspects that relate to the nature of the data uncovered;

- a) *what* specific travel product or combination of products were purchased,
- b) *who* made the purchase,
- c) *where* or how was the purchase made, and
- d) *when* was the actual booking made.

The two latter aspects were deemed to be particularly important and as such respondents were also questioned on these points in relation to their last main holiday purchase. Useful

comparisons could therefore be made between respondent's city break and main holiday purchase behaviour.

### 6.7.2 *Who Makes the City Break Booking?*

In terms of *who* purchased city break trips to Dublin, the data reveal a number of noticeable findings. Firstly, in half of all city break trips, the purchase was made by someone other than the respondent themselves or their travel partners. These other people included group leaders, family members or friends (who did not travel), and intermediaries (travel agent / tour operator) who purchased on behalf of the traveller. Table 6.11 shows the breakdown of this purchasing pattern. One can see, for example, that a fifth of respondents were part of a group where the booking was made by a group leader. This was typical in the case of stag and hen party participants where responsibility was delegated to a particular member of the group to make arrangements on behalf of the whole party.

**Table 6.11**  
**Who Purchased City Break**

<i>Purchaser</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Self or travel partner	50.0%	(n = 20)
Group Leader	20.0%	(n = 8)
Intermediary	17.5%	(n = 7)
Family/Friend (non traveller)	12.5%	(n = 5)

For some, mostly older, respondents (12.5%), booking online proved slightly daunting, and so they enlisted the help of family members or friends to make the bookings for them. Almost a fifth of respondents used an intermediary such as a travel agent to purchase their trip. In general these people felt more confident and secure with a travel professional making the booking for them.

### 6.7.3 *Components of the City Break Product*

In terms of *what* travel products city break respondents bought, the following table (Table 6.12) reveals the main combinations of holiday components purchased. The vast majority of trips (82%) consisted of just two main elements, flight and accommodation.

**Table 6.12**  
**City Break Components Purchased**

Flight & Accommodation only	82.5% (n = 33)
Flight, Accommodation & Concert Ticket	5.0% (n = 2)
Flight, Accommodation & Game Ticket	7.5% (n = 3)
Flight, Accommodation & Car	5.0% (n = 2)

This plainly highlights the simple and uncomplicated nature of most city breaks. As one respondent succinctly put it;

*“It is very easy, there is only a hotel and airplane to think about. And then you go”* (Phillipe, Paris).

Where additional components were purchased these consisted of concert tickets, match tickets and car hire - however these additional elements were only present in 18% of the total city breaks purchased.

#### **6.7.4 Where and When of City Break Purchasing**

The *where* and *when* aspects of the city break purchase, deal with the method and timing of the bookings. The findings in relation to these aspects of the purchase act are highlighted in Tables 6.13 and 6.14. In order to provide a more meaningful analysis, the table also highlights the corresponding findings in relation to people’s main holiday purchase. One of the strongest points that emerges from observing these tables is the massive importance the internet plays in city break purchase behaviour.

**Table 6.13**  
**Comparison of *Where* Respondents Booked Holidays**

<i>Where booked</i>	<i>City Break</i>	<i>Main Holiday</i>
Internet (transport)	65.0% (n = 26)	20.0% (n = 8)
Direct with transport provider	7.5% (n = 3)	5.0% (n = 2)
Internet (Accommodation)	62.5% (n = 25)	17.5% (n = 7)
Direct with accommodation provider	7.5% (n = 3)	7.5% (n = 3)
Travel. Agent (Package)	27.5% (n = 11)	60.0% (n = 24)
Didn't take one / don't know	0.0%	12.5% (n = 5)

**Table 6.14**  
**Comparison of *When* Respondents Booked Holidays**

<i>When booked</i>	<i>City Break</i>	<i>Main Holiday</i>
0 - 2 weeks before	12.5% (n = 5)	2.5% (n = 1)
3 - 4 weeks before	57.5% (n = 23)	7.5% (n = 3)
5 – 8 weeks before	22.5% (n = 9)	27.5% (n = 11)
9 – 16 weeks before	7.5% (n = 3)	27.5% (n = 11)
> 16 weeks before	0.0%	20% (n = 8)
None taken / Don't know	0.0%	15% (n = 6)

As already noted, city breakers used the internet extensively for information gathering and trip planning. However, these findings show they are also highly likely to follow through to the crucial next stage and actually purchase online. The findings show most respondents were very much at ease booking online;

*“Well it's just so easy now isn't it? I mean, you just put in your dates and the number of people, and that's it. I mean some of the websites will actually search around the different sites and bring you the best deal. It's brilliant”* (Dan, Guildford).

There is no doubt that people's attitude towards online purchasing is changing with more travellers becoming increasingly comfortable booking via electronic means. There is also a sense of control and indeed accomplishment that people feel from doing it themselves;

*“And you choose which is important. You don't have to go in somewhere and talk to people, you choose what hotel you want, what area it's in, and then if you can make it all match up it feels great”* (Diane, London).

The statistics back up this increased online purchasing confidence, with figures from Gulliver, the booking engine behind Dublin Tourism's website, showing online bookings in 2004 growing by 31% compared to the previous year (ITIC, 2005). The uncomplicated nature of most city break holidays, as highlighted previously, makes them ideally suited to online booking.

#### **6.7.5 City Break versus Main Holiday Purchase Behaviour**

This suitability is especially evident when one compares respondents' city break purchase methods with those of their main holiday. As Table 6.13 indicates, respondents showed a much greater tendency to book their city break on the internet compared to their last main holiday. Visitor responses show that this discrepancy can be attributed to three overriding themes. Firstly, because of the opportunistic nature of many city breaks, the internet provided an ideal vehicle for finding deals and special offers. The convenience of having this service either at home or at one's desk adds to the likelihood of using it to purchase a discretionary holiday such as a city break. Main holidays on the other hand tended to be better thought out and planned with longer lead in times, as Table 6.14 shows. We can see from this table that 70% of city breaks were booked 4 weeks or less before the trip, compared with just 10% of main holiday bookings. This highlights the spontaneity and last minute nature of many city break bookings compared to main holidays.

The second major reason for the discrepancy between the two types of trips relates to the perceived risk attached to the purchase. As discussed previously, the city break trip is generally perceived to be a less risky holiday purchase. Therefore most respondents felt confident enough to go it alone without the aid of a travel agent. Teare (1994) found a similar situation with consumers of short break hotel purchases in the UK, where people were found

to employ low involvement decision making behaviour due to the perception of low risk - resulting in the avoidance of travel agents.

In this research, the perception of risk was more evident in people's main holiday purchase. For example, the findings show that 60% of main holidays were booked via travel agents compared to just 28% of city breaks. The findings indicate the increased importance of travel agent's as advisors and 'risk reducers.' As Wolfe et al. (2004) note, the internet has transformed the role of travel agents from order takers to that of consultants. The sector is fast realising that much of their reservation making role is now being carried out by consumers themselves from the comfort of their own homes or offices. Consequently their real value now lies in their consultative and advisory role.

It is important to note however that not all city break purchases were perceived to be low risk. Some people did book through intermediaries or contacted the product providers directly in order to reduce, what Teare (1994) calls "residual feelings of uncertainty." This is evident in the following response from a hen party leader when asked why she made the hotel booking over the phone instead of on the internet (where she had initially gotten information about the hotel);

*"Well I guess I wanted to just check a few things with someone in person, particularly when I was booking for a group of people, I wanted to make sure everything was alright"* (Lindsey, Manchester).

We can see that the extra responsibility of booking on behalf of others raised the risk level of what otherwise would have been a fairly simple purchase. In another case a respondent refrained from booking her city break online because the trip was her honeymoon and as such held extra significance for her. In these circumstances she sought the services of a travel agent because she wanted the security of knowing that everything would go well on this special trip.

The third main reason for the discrepancy in internet booking behaviour related to the ability of people to access special deals, particularly cheap flights. Because of the nature of the trip, many city breaks consisted of late or discounted offers, most of which could only be availed of through the internet. For example, low cost carrier flights (a favourite of city break

visitors), are almost exclusively sold online. Travel agents in some cases refuse to sell such flights, and where they do, they tend to charge the consumer a service fee. Consumers therefore have little option but to go online if they wish to avail of these special flight deals.

#### **6.7.6 Sequence of City Break Purchase**

Having analysed four main aspects of the purchase decision (who, what, where and when) one final observation that should be mentioned concerns the order of the purchase. In terms of purchasing sequence, the booking behaviour seems to have taken a particular pattern where people first searched the internet for flights and then looked for accommodation. The quest for a cheap flight was often the initial starting point which attracted people online. When a suitable one was found, attention quickly turned to accommodation. Searching frequently involved cross checking to ensure times and dates matched. Some people showed quite a relaxed attitude to accommodation, leaving it until the last moment, or indeed waiting until they had arrived in Dublin. One respondent claimed that he usually waits until he arrives at a destination before he books anything;

*“I do that quite a lot, I’ve been to a few places where I don’t book anything. I find it when I get there. It’s a good way to go. You’ll always find a bed somewhere. I never had to sleep on a park bench yet (laughs). I like to stay in cheaper places, so I’ll try them first and if I have to I’ll stay in a more expensive one. You’ll always get something” (Frank, Glasgow).*

Some people booked their accommodation directly from the product providers own websites while others used electronic intermediaries such as Expedia, and Hotels.com. Flights were mostly booked via airlines own websites.

In summary, we can see that the purchase act for city breaks is characterised by a number of factors, the most salient of which is the strong role the internet plays in the booking process. City breaks are essentially uncomplicated and relatively inexpensive holiday products, which makes them a less risky proposition for potential travel consumers. Consequently city break purchasing shows signs of impulsive and spontaneous behaviour which is reflected in the late booking patterns seen previously.

## **6.8 Post-Purchase Evaluation**

The final stage of the city break decision process consists of post purchase evaluation, in which visitors measure their experience of the travel product against their pre-consumption expectations. The result of this process is generally expressed in terms of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and usually has a bearing on future purchasing behaviour.

In order to understand city break visitor's evaluation of their trip to Dublin, respondents were asked to describe their overall experience of the trip in terms of whether it matched their prior expectations. In an ideal situation this information would have been ascertained after the respondents had returned home. However, as explained in the methodology section, this was not possible given the logistical constraints involved in such a scenario. Therefore people were asked to give their opinion of their trip during the interviews in Dublin. Most people were at least half way through their trip when interviewed and all were able, at least in some way, to give an assessment of their trip up to that point.

In order to gain some insight into the extent of respondent's prior knowledge and impression of Dublin, it was decided to ask people to articulate the mental image they possessed of the city before they arrived. It was felt that this would be useful, as it would highlight people's pre-conceived opinion of Dublin as a destination. This in turn would act as a useful point of comparison for people's stated experience of the city.

The following sections examine these two areas - respondents pre-trip image of Dublin, and their stated experience of the city in terms of how it matched their expectations.

### **6.8.1 *Image of Dublin***

Gensch (1978, p.384) describes image as "an abstract concept incorporating the influences of past promotion, reputation and peer evaluation of the alternative. Image connotes the expectation of the user." In order to elicit the expectations of visitors, respondents were encouraged to articulate free-form descriptions of their image of Dublin (Boivin, 1986). In other words, they were asked to describe their impressions of Dublin prior to taking the city break (particularly the first thing(s) that came to mind). This unstructured approach is more suited to capturing the holistic components of images and unique individual features that a



highly structured technique might possibly miss (Sussmann & Unel, 1999). The following table (Table 6.15) categorises respondents' images of Dublin in terms of how often they were cited.

**Table 6.15**  
**Image of Dublin Prior to Visiting**

Good / Fun Atmosphere	25% (n = 10)
Pubs / Guinness	25% (n = 10)
Version of London / English city	22.5% (n = 9)
Rural/ Provincial City	12.5% (n = 5)
No main image	12.5% (n = 5)
Friendly	7.5% (n = 3)
Laid back / relaxed	7.5% (n = 3)
Cultured	7.5% (n = 3)
Cosmopolitan	5% (n = 2)
Coloured doors	2.5% (n = 1)
Leprechaun	2.5% (n = 1)
St Patrick's festival	2.5% (n = 1)
Red hair	2.5% (n = 1)
Pretty	2.5% (n = 1)

The findings show that the main view people expressed regarding their prior image of Dublin was one of a fun and lively destination - a city with a good atmosphere;

*“I had a good image of Dublin. I think it is a fun place, people know how to have a good time. There is a good... atmosphere”* (Didier, Lyon).

The city was also closely associated with drinking. One in four people mentioned either pubs or Guinness when asked about their image of the city. Mostly this association was positive. In many cases, both of these factors, ‘fun atmosphere’ and ‘drink’ were interlinked in people’s image of the city.

Many British visitors believed Dublin would be similar to the cities they were familiar with at home. In particular, London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Cardiff were mentioned. In these cases, people did not expect Dublin to be much different, particularly from a physical perspective;

*“I just thought it would be similar to Cardiff, you know, size wise and generally the appearance of it. But it’s like a proper capital city, you know – with the houses of parliament and the big buildings and monuments and things”* (Ian, Cardiff).

In addition, some respondents had a somewhat naive image of Dublin as a rather rural or provincial city. Some people’s prior image was of a big town surrounded by countryside. These people expressed surprise when they saw the reality;

*“The first time I came here I thought it would be a little bit more backward, a little bit more rural... but then I thought, this is a very, very, sophisticated European city”* (Paul, Bath).

Interestingly, a significant number of people said they had no predominant image at all of Dublin before they came. These respondents could not think of any image they could associate with the city. This obviously raises questions in terms of Dublin’s branding and marketing efforts.

Other images that people were able to recall included, friendly people, laid back and relaxed atmosphere, and Dublin as a cultured city, although this latter image featured less prominently than the city marketing bodies would probably like to have seen. There were also some interesting individual images that people associated with the city including: ‘row of painted doors’, St Patrick’s Day, the Leprechaun, and even red hair, although the latter two could probably be applied to Ireland as a whole.

### **6.8.2 Experience of Dublin**

Customer satisfaction is the key outcome of the decision making process. In order to assess people’s satisfaction with their city break, respondents were asked to evaluate the trip by comparing the service they experienced with their expectations. The majority of people stated the experience had matched or exceeded their expectations, which according to Oliver’s (1987) expectancy disconfirmation model, means they were satisfied. This high level of

satisfaction is particularly important for city tourism providers and marketers, as repeat business and word of mouth recommendation is so important in the city break sector.

**Table 6.16**  
**Satisfaction with City Break Trip**

Matched or exceeded expectations	90% (n = 36)
Did not meet expectations	10% (n = 4)

As well as confirming whether or not the city break had lived up to their pre trip expectations, most respondents also gave an assessment of their experience of the trip up to that moment. These experiences were categorised and are highlighted in Table 6.17. We can see that *friendliness* and *good fun* were the most common themes expressed by respondents, suggesting a general positive perception of the city and the trip as a whole. Friendliness in particular was interesting as it did not register very significantly as an initial factor in people's prior image of Dublin;

*“I just found people very pleasant – everyone seemed to be friendly and willing to talk. There just seems to be a kind of openness there that you don't seem to get in the UK anymore”*  
(Brian, Nottingham).

**Table 6.17**  
**People's Main Experiences of Dublin**

Friendly	30.0%
Good / Fun atmosphere	25.0%
Multicultural city	22.5%
Building / development	22.5%
Big city	20.0%
Expensive	20.0%
Modern / cosmopolitan	17.5%
Congested	12.5%
Relaxed	7.5%
Smoking ban	7.5%
Good Shopping	7.5%
Litter	7.5%
Not child friendly	7.5%
Good Nightlife	5.0%
Good product provider experience	5.0%
Bad product provider experience	5.0%
Non traditional pubs	2.5%
Money (confusing)	2.5%
Just like London	2.5%
Easy to Walk	2.5%

One of the most surprising elements of Dublin that people experienced was the changing face of the city in terms of the different nationalities living and working there. This was viewed in two main ways. On the one hand, many saw this development as a positive aspect of the city, evidence of the maturity and evolution of Dublin as a truly international city.

Others however were somewhat disappointed by the development, mainly from the viewpoint of not being able to meet Dubliners in Dublin.

Similarly, the huge building work and development that has been a feature of the urban environment for the past number of years was a surprise to many respondents. Again, people seemed somewhat divided on this issue with some believing it to be a sign of the city's prosperity while others took a more pessimistic view. Most of these did not like to see Dublin as a 'building site' and in a few cases respondents were personally discommoded by the building work.

A number of people were surprised by the size of Dublin. They did not expect the city to be so big. On the other hand, a number of people also commented that the city centre was very walkable and easy to get around;

*"Everything seems to be near together. We were able to visit lots of places without using a train or taxi, this is good I think"* (Michael, Hamburg).

A significant number also thought the city was quite cosmopolitan and modern. This is no doubt linked to the aforementioned multicultural and prosperous aspects observed by respondents. The smoking ban was highlighted by a few people as an interesting experience on their trip. Most felt it was a positive thing and something that made their city experience more comfortable.

In terms of negative experiences, the cost of food and drink was the main grievance people had with Dublin. A few people also found the city to be quite congested, while some complained about the excessive amounts of litter they saw. In addition, some people also mentioned that the city was not very child friendly or didn't have enough facilities to keep them entertained. However, these negative reactions tended to be exceptions to the norm. In general people were quite positive about their experience of the city and many expressed an interest in returning. This interest varied from people wanting to come back for a weekend to people wanting to live in the city. Interestingly, a couple of people viewed their city break to Dublin as a 'taster' for a more extensive trip to Ireland at a later stage;

*"It's nice to do city breaks, probably because you can go to so many different places and get a taste of a place. And what I've seen of Dublin so far I'd like to come back and see some more of Ireland. So, from that point of view it gives you that taster. You can then go on – I'd like to come back and travel the countryside and stay in little places"* (Diane, London).

This is an important point in the context of criticism which Dublin has received in recent times regarding its strong growth at the expense of the rest of Ireland.

In summary, the predominant image of Dublin for city breakers was one of a fun and lively place, commonly associated with drinking and merriment. The failure of a strong cultural image to be perceived in any significant way prior to the visit was interesting to note. For many British visitors, the image of Dublin was either non-existent or did not differ in any discernable way from their view of cities in the UK. The findings also show the continuing strength of the Guinness brand and in particular its association with the city of Dublin.

For most people the city lived up to its fun and lively image. Interestingly, friendliness was the most commonly mentioned experience even though it did not register in any significant way in people's initial image of the city. Some negative experiences were also cited including, high prices, litter, congestion and a lack of children's amenities.

## **6.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings relating to Phase Two of the research. The purpose of this phase was to gather quality, context rich data to explain the motivation and decision making behaviour of international city break visitors to Dublin. To this end, 40 city break tourists were interviewed to uncover their experiences relating to all aspects of their holiday purchase. This data was subsequently analysed and presented in a sequential manner that follows the general decision process.

The first stage dealt with the initial motivation to take a city break trip. The findings here showed escaping pressures or situations in the home environment and the need to socialise with friends or partners were the main reasons 'pushing' people towards a city break. Certain pull factors were also found to be extremely important - in particular, ease of access and the availability of cheap flights. In addition, the findings confirm variations in travel motives according to type of trip with significant differences observed between the motives for taking a city break and those for a main holiday.

In terms of information search, the results highlight the importance and influence of personal / non-commercial sources. In addition, the internet was found to be the most consulted information source and played a very significant role throughout the whole city break decision process. Overall, city breaks were characterised by low involvement search behaviour, particularly when compared to main holidays. The reasons for this include; the absence of children, lower perceived financial risk, familiarity with the destination and the uncomplicated nature of the holidays.

Most people did not consider any alternatives to Dublin before they purchased their city break. For those who did, their consideration set tended to be small, with Prague, Amsterdam and Glasgow proving to be the main alternative cities considered. The attributes that turned out to be most salient in the choice process were cost, ease of access and the prospect of fun. Some clearly defined heuristics were evident in the decision strategies employed, including compensatory and non-compensatory rules. In some cases, unforeseen circumstances arising in people's lives were often responsible for impulsive buying behaviour.

In terms of actual booking behaviour, the findings show that people were more likely to book their city breaks online and closer to departure time compared to their main holidays. The uncomplicated and low risk perception of city breaks made them very suited to online purchasing.

Overall people expressed satisfaction with their city break trip to Dublin. They felt that the city had a fun and friendly atmosphere with a lively pub scene - although some expressed disappointment in relation to prices, litter, and congestion.

In addition, the rapidly changing face of the city was markedly observed by many. Most acknowledged the cosmopolitan and modern appearance of the city - however, few expected the ethnic diversity that is currently a feature.

In summary the findings in this chapter represent an in-depth examination of a topic that has not been addressed previously in academic research - the city break travel decision. Given the exploratory nature of the research in this phase, quality and richness of data became the overriding priority. In this regard it was seen as necessary (through the interview process), to

allow peoples' travel 'stories' to be told, and from the ensuing data to identify themes and concepts relating to their city break decision.

Such an approach obviously places more emphasis on depth rather than breadth and as such has limitations in terms of generalisability. While this is recognised and acknowledged, it is important to also highlight that opportunities exist for similar research to be conducted in other cities. Such future studies could provide comparative data that would help to further explore generalisability in addition to overall trends.

Finally, the themes and concepts presented here in relation to Phase Two will be further discussed in the following chapter, where all the principal findings uncovered in the research up to now will be brought together and examined in order to address the overall aims of the study.



# Chapter Seven

## Discussion

## **7.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the crucial findings of the research to address the main objectives of the study. It is important therefore to restate the principal aims once more. These are:

1. To examine the city break travel phenomenon by reviewing existing literature and studies on the topic.
2. To develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists.
3. To analyse the distinctiveness of a city break holiday by finding out its principal characteristics and features.
4. To investigate the motivations and decision-making behaviour of city break holidaymakers.
5. To examine the influence of 'type of trip' in the travel decision making process.

These aims were examined in the context of Dublin city, which was used as the 'lens' through which the city break phenomenon was observed.

In order to ensure all of these aims have been addressed, each will be taken and discussed in turn. The discussion will draw on, and try to interpret, the most relevant findings from Phases One and Two, the literature review, and where relevant some new secondary sources of information.

## **7.2 Examination of the City Break Travel Phenomenon**

There is no doubt that city break travel has had a significant effect on the shifting demand patterns of European tourists in recent years. The city break market continues to grow at a faster rate than other tourism sectors such as sun and beach holidays (WTM, 2005). However, in spite of this growth and development, our knowledge of city break travel demand remains relatively poor. With a few notable exceptions, little data specifically relating to city break trip-taking currently exists. This seems unusual given the importance which this travel segment has assumed in recent years. However, as previously discussed, the city break market has not always been easy to measure - partly due to the complex and multifaceted

nature of urban tourism. Cities are notoriously complicated destinations and the city break segment has not always been easy to identify or measure.

For the purpose of this research, only commercial city breaks were considered - therefore people returning home to Dublin to visit family and friends were not included. In addition, those who passed through the city on route to other regions and locations were not viewed as city break tourists. Only people who visited the city for the entirety of their trip were deemed to be city breakers. This is a crucial factor as it highlights one of the principal aspects of city break travel - the fact that the city exclusively is the main location of the traveller's holiday.

### **7.2.1 *Focus on the City***

In terms of travel trends, this focusing on cities for leisure breaks is a relatively new phenomenon, and has resulted in the blossoming and rejuvenation of many urban areas throughout Europe. The city has become not just an entry, exit or transit point for travellers, but a desired destination in its own right. Cities are moving centre stage, providing a leisure experience that is diverse, immediate and convenient for travellers. The city, as the sole focus of an international leisure trip, has become a contemporary phenomenon. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Dublin where 31% of all holidaymakers to Ireland never leave the Dublin region on an overnight trip (ITIC, 2005). In Chapter Two, many reasons were put forward to explain this phenomenon including; the increased availability of low cost air travel, people taking shorter and more frequent leisure trips, and the burgeoning usage of the internet for searching and buying travel (Trew & Cockrell, 2002; Page, 2002). These three factors in particular are considered to be the principal drivers in the growth of city only holidays. All three are very much interlinked and each was found in this research to have played a significant role in the success of Dublin as a city break destination.

### **7.2.2 *Impacts of the City Break Phenomenon***

In reviewing the impacts of the city break phenomenon on European tourism, it is possible to make a number of interesting observations. Firstly, the phenomenon has led to the increasing development of cities as separate and distinct destination brands. Some, such as London, Paris and Rome, were already well established, but for a number of others the city break trend has transformed them into major urban tourism destinations. In some cases these cities have developed a greater tourism brand identity than the countries they belong to; Prague and Budapest being cases in point. The findings in this research show that most city

breakers firmly viewed themselves as visiting Dublin as opposed to Ireland. The Dublin brand is intentionally promoted (by Dublin Tourism) as something separate from brand Ireland. This practice is being replicated all over Europe with newer eastern European city destinations beginning to follow suit. Cities such as Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius are keen to establish themselves as destination brands in the minds of western Europeans and benefit from people's quest for new city break options.

### **7.2.3 *Impact of Low Cost Carriers***

As the literature has shown, much of this travel desire is driven by the growth of low cost airlines. The presence of such carriers can transform the tourist fortunes of a destination. However, it's important to note, not everyone is happy about such a presence. Some people question the type of tourism that follows from the introduction of such routes. Low yield and invasive forms of tourism are commonly cited as being synonymous with low cost air access. A good example of this is the recent efforts by the residents and homeowners of Deauville in Normandy to stop the arrival of cheap Ryanair flights from London. Such a development, they believed, would encourage an influx of downmarket, short break travellers to their traditionally upmarket resort town.

Similar criticisms have also been raised in other cities. For example, in Tallinn, a large amount of the rapidly growing city break market is made up of stag and hen parties, and although keenly welcomed in the beginning, by the city's nascent tourism industry, the extent of this traffic has inevitably lead to concerns about the destination's long term sustainability. Dublin has also experienced problems in this regard. However, in recent years a concerted effort has been made by the city's tourism stakeholders to discourage this form of tourism. This has met with a certain degree of success as the city's other attributes, besides its pubs and nightlife, have been emphasised more in promotional efforts. It is important to note therefore, not all city break visitors are appreciated by the urban communities that host them.

However, it would be wrong to get the impression that the city break market is mostly made up of hedonistic, invasive and low yielding tourists. Certainly, a number of city breakers fall into this category, but as the findings from Phase One have shown, city break visitors overall, differ very little in terms of the activities they engage in and the amount of money they spend.

An arguably more pressing criticism levelled at city break travel, concerns the impact the sector is having on regional and rural tourism in some countries. This is certainly the case in Ireland where there is significant dissatisfaction with the perceived loss of tourism business by rural and regional areas to the increasingly popular urban destinations, particularly Dublin. According to the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation's report of visitor distribution in Ireland, the number of nights spent by international holidaymakers outside of the capital in 2003 was 2.7 million fewer than in 1999. Over the same period, bednights by holidaymakers to Dublin increased by almost 2 million (ITIC, 2005). These figures highlight a fundamental change in the spatial spread of visitors to Ireland and one which is clearly worrying tourism authorities in the country. However, the critical question seems to be, whether or not Dublin is 'taking' visitors from other regions or whether it is just a case of fewer people wishing to visit rural or regional destinations. The ITIC report (2005, p.1) states that visitors to Ireland are not substituting one part of the country for another, but rather, "Ireland is now attracting two distinct markets – those attracted to short breaks in Dublin, and visitors motivated by the Irish scenery, its people and range of things to do and see." The report goes on to claim that the fall off in demand for holidays outside of Dublin is partially explained by the parallel reduction in car-based tourism, and the wider range of competitively priced air services into Dublin.

Looking forward, it is not certain if cities will always enjoy the popularity that they do today, however there is nothing to suggest that things are going to change in the near future. This means that opportunities will continue to present themselves for urban tourism stakeholders, and challenges will continue to be overcome. One thing is certain however, greater knowledge is required if the sector is to be properly understood and exploited - in particular, knowledge in relation to how city breaks differ from other forms of holidays, and the deep rooted motives and decision processes involved in taking such trips. These issues will now be discussed in order to address this knowledge gap.

### **7.3 Towards a Profile of the City Break Visitor**

As discussed in the literature review, no typical urban tourist profile exists. People use urban spaces in a variety of ways and are drawn to them for a range of reasons. As seen previously, categorising urban tourists according to primary motives for travel is a commonly utilised means of differentiating between them. However, the value of such an approach is limited because it doesn't take into account the 'multimotivational user' in the 'multifunctional city.' By contrast, categorising urban visitors according to the nature of their holiday i.e. main holiday, city break, VFR etc., may offer more useful and valuable insights into a city's urban tourism market.

#### **7.3.1 Visitor Origin**

In Chapter 5, the findings from Phase One (following chi-square testing), showed three areas in particular where city breaks were distinctive; visitor origin, educational achievement, and occupational background. The results in relation to visitor origin, in particular, showed the greatest difference between city breakers and other holidaymakers to Dublin. The vast majority (80%) of city breakers originated from Britain, while just 3% came from North America. This was in contrast to the non city break holidaymakers who were much more evenly distributed in terms of origin, with 31% from the UK and 30% from North America. This particularly high figure for British city breakers is backed up by the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (2005, p.23) who state that "an estimated 80% of the short break market to Dublin is British." So why is the city break visitor to Dublin much more likely to come from Britain than anywhere else? Two reasons in particular stand out;

Firstly, Dublin city is an extremely convenient destination in terms of access, particularly for a short discretionary trip such as a city break. This study has shown that cheap, easy and fast air access is central to the success of Dublin as a city break destination. Nowhere is air access into Dublin, cheaper, easier, or faster than from Britain.

The second reason for the high concentration of British city breakers relates to the familiarity of Dublin as a destination. Phase Two findings have shown that many British visitors feel they know Dublin or consider it similar to other British cities. There are no language barriers and many of the shops are familiar. Therefore, although a city break to Dublin represents an overseas holiday for British visitors, the purchase risk element is perceived to be quite low.

### **7.3.2 Education and Occupation**

Besides country of origin, city break visitors also show distinctiveness in two other key areas - education and occupation. With regards to education, the findings from Phase One show that city breakers are more likely to have lower level qualifications than non city break holidaymakers. In addition, and probably connected to this, are the differences noted in relation to occupation. The findings show that city breakers are less likely to hold senior or middle management positions compared to other city holidaymakers. One explanation for these findings may be the increased 'democratisation' of international travel (Richter, 2003). Traditionally, international holidays have been the preserve of the wealthier and more affluent in society. With money and time generally being considered the major constraints on people's ability to take part in leisure trips, the introduction of low cost international air travel and the increased availability of budget and mid priced accommodation in Europe has changed this dynamic significantly. It has arguably, never been easier for people on lower incomes and from lower social backgrounds to engage in international trip taking. City breaks have proven to be an ideal vehicle for all sections of society to engage in leisure travel. This is because, at their most basic, city breaks require quite modest financial and time resources from travellers, particularly when compared to other types of international holidays. Such trips therefore, represent a more accessible holiday option for a wider range of the population.

At the same time it would be wrong to perceive city break travellers, in general, as lowly educated and from lower social groupings. After all, the findings also show that over 56% have a third level qualification consisting of, either a diploma/degree or higher degree. It is probably more accurate to describe them as showing a more diverse range of educational and occupational backgrounds compared to other leisure visitors to Dublin. In reality, the city break cohort represents a truly varied mix of people from a wide spectrum of society.

In relation to age and gender, the findings from Phase One show no significant differences between city breakers and other leisure visitors. The perception of many city breakers as young hedonistic travellers was not really borne out by the results. Instead a very evenly distributed age profile was evident, with no significant difference being detected compared to non city break visitors.

However, within the city break segment itself, it is possible to see differences between visitors based on both of these characteristics. For example, women were more likely to visit for shopping reasons, while men were more likely to come to attend a sporting event. Similarly younger people were more likely to visit for stag and hen parties, while older travellers showed more inclination to come for cultural reasons. However, on the whole the numbers balance out, and overall the findings indicate no significant bias either way in relation to gender or age.

In summary, we can see that city breakers show certain distinctive characteristics. Compared to other leisure visitors they are more likely to come from our nearest and largest source market, Britain. They show more varied distribution in terms of education level and occupation. However, in terms of age and gender they are likely to be the same as other leisure visitors.

## **7.4 Distinctive Characteristics of City Break Travel**

Throughout this study importance has been placed on type of trip as a point of analysis, particularly in the context of understanding motives and decision making. Failing to differentiate between types of trips in travel research, can be a significant oversight, yet has been quite a common practice in previous research. For example, many travel motive studies ask respondents to comment on a planned or previous holiday, without distinguishing the nature of the trip e.g. family holiday, activity holiday, VFR, short break etc. Treating all trips the same, in this manner, seems a shortcoming in any study purporting to examine the motives of travel. It is important therefore to distinguish, where possible, between different types of trips, pointing out distinctive features and characteristics where relevant. To this end, in light of the findings from the research up to now, the next section will examine and discuss the distinctive characteristics of city break travel.



### **7.4.1 The 5 Ds of City Break Trips**

A number of distinctive features of city break travel have become apparent during the course of this research. These have emerged at various points in the study and will now be discussed in an effort to shed light on the factors that make city break trips different from other types of holidays. In total, five distinctive features will be discussed and for convenience they will be described under the label of ‘5 Ds.’ These are; *Duration*, *Distance*, *Date flexibility*, *Discretionary nature*, and *Destination travel party*.

#### **7.4.1.1 Duration**

The first distinctive feature of city break travel relates to the length of the trip. The findings in this research support the common view (Law, 2002; Trew & Cockerell, 2002) that city breaks generally consist of short stay trips. The results from Phase One show how city break visitors stay for noticeably shorter periods compared to other leisure tourists (55% staying 3 nights or less, compared to 6% for non city break holidaymakers). Similar results emerged from Phase Two where the majority of city breakers were in Dublin for just 2 or 3 nights.

It would be wrong however to assume that all city breaks are short breaks, clearly they are not. Some people come on city only holidays for longer durations, and indeed, as pointed out previously, there is evidence to suggest that longer city break trips are growing faster than average (Trew & Cockerell, 2002). In addition, certain groups and nationalities have a tendency to take longer city breaks than others. However, in general, the evidence points to most city breaks being short, usually 3 nights or less. This brings us to the question of why. Why are most city breaks short in duration? The research indicates three main reasons that explain this. Firstly, city breaks tend to be secondary trips often supplementing a person’s main holiday. In this regard they tend to be of a shorter duration as they are complementing rather than replacing a bigger trip.

Secondly, as Law (1993) and Burtenshaw et al. (1991) point out, many people are able to see and experience what they want, in most cities, in a few days. This was confirmed in the Phase Two interviews where a number of people, although indicating their approval with Dublin, also pointed out that a few days or a weekend in the city was adequate to satisfy their city break requirements. This was echoed by people who visited the city for concerts or sports games, which by their nature tend to be short term events.

The third reason relates to the international trend towards shorter, but more frequent leisure trips. The average length of stay in Ireland by British holidaymakers was two full days shorter in 2003 than it was in 1999, and one day shorter for Dutch and German holidaymakers (ITIC, 2005). This trend has been one of the most important developments in European travel in recent years. However, the extent to which city breaks are contributing to this trend is hard to say, although there is little doubt they are playing a significant role. This is not surprising given the fact that cities, as destinations, lend themselves easily to short break travel. For time pressed travellers, cities can be reached directly, thus reducing or eliminating the transfer issues commonly associated with longer holidays. In addition, attractions and amenities are generally clustered or located close together, resulting in little time spent (or wasted, as it may be perceived) travelling around the destination. Thus, for many people, cities represent the ideal short break holiday destination.

#### **7.4.1.2 Distance**

The second distinctive characteristic of city break trips relates to the distance people travel to take such holidays. As previously noted, city break visitors tend to mostly come from nearby source markets. This fact is very much evident in Dublin where 80% of the city break market comes from Britain. Urban tourism demand in many other European cities follows a similar trend. Prague's reliance on the German market has been mentioned previously. A similar situation exists with Bratislava, where air passenger figures show 5 of the top 6 routes into the city come from near neighbours (see Appendix 7.1). Because the length of city breaks is generally short, people don't want to spend much time getting to and from the destination. The increased availability of low cost air access has improved matters greatly in this regard. In many cases cheap frequent access is most prevalent from neighbouring markets. For example, the number of air routes into Dublin is highest from Britain. Ryanair alone flies routes to Dublin from 17 different British airports. The impact of this cheap air access is reflected in the holiday arrivals statistics, which show growth in air travel to Dublin far exceeding that of ferry services. As Table 7.1 shows, holiday arrivals by air increased by 32% from 1999 to 2003. During the same period ferry arrivals declined by 26%. Clearly, low cost airlines have taken over from ferries as the cheapest mode of access transport.

**Table 7.1**  
**Holiday Arrivals into Dublin 2003 v 1999 (000s)**

	<i>1999</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>% Change</i>
<i>Air</i>	1,376	1,812	+32%
<i>Sea</i>	515	380	-26%

*Source:* Fáilte Ireland Survey of Travellers

In addition, car journeys have become more stressful and less appealing for many city breakers, due to congestion and safety issues as well as the tightening of regulations governing driving behaviour. Thus, cheap, direct air access is a hugely attractive transport option for the time pressed city break visitor. For Dublin, this is reflected in the large number of city breakers coming from Britain. For these people, Dublin represented one of the most easily accessible and cheapest overseas destinations available to them.

#### **7.4.1.3 Discretionary Nature**

Another feature of city breaks is the apparent discretionary nature of the trips. During the visitor interviews respondents were asked about their trip taking patterns in the previous year. This was done to examine how the city break fitted in with other trips (if any) they had taken. The findings showed that people had generally taken the city break as an additional trip to their main holiday. There were only 3 cases where the Dublin city break was considered the principal, or indeed only, holiday of the year. In most cases the trip was viewed as a discretionary break, and for some an opportunistic one. This is reflected in the short decision time that was evident with many of the trips. Phase One results show 56% of city breakers booked their accommodation less than 4 weeks before their trip compared with 37% of non city break holidaymakers. This last minute behaviour was also evident in Phase Two results, which showed 67% of city breakers booking their holiday less than 4 weeks before arrival. Clearly, for most people, city breaks are conceived and acted on in a relatively short period of time, with the internet playing a significant role in this behaviour.

The influence of situational factors also contributes to the discretionary nature of city breaks. Evidence from the interviews, shows that the genesis of many city break ideas can be traced to particular circumstances that people faced, or situations that arose in people's lives. These were quite diverse and ranged from financial windfalls to family bereavements. However all had a similar outcome, in that, a city break was considered an appropriate response to the particular situation they faced.

In some cases the city break was organised by a third party, and as such the decision came down to a simple, 'do I join this trip or not?' choice. Once this decision was made respondents had very little other input into the trip, except to participate. This often differed from people's main holiday situation, where the initial generic decision of whether or not to take a trip was, in many cases, already made. For example, for a number of people the main holiday was an annual ritual. Therefore, the decision making tended to focus instead on where to go, or what kind of trip to take. By contrast, the city break trip was usually not predetermined and as such the decision process was more discretionary in nature. Interestingly, the decision process frequently did not follow the normal sequence outlined in the literature. For example, the conventional view is that people first decide on whether or not to take a trip (what Hodgson calls first order questions), and then subsequently choose what kind of trip to take (second order questions). However, for many city breakers these decisions were made concurrently. In other words, people often came upon a good city break deal or were introduced to one and decided to 'go for it,' and as such were making first and second order decisions simultaneously. This reflects impulsive or opportunistic decision making behaviour that is very much linked to the discretionary nature of such trips. It also shows the strength of special offers and deals when discovered by people at specific times. Advertisements for cheap flights, in particular, were found to stimulate demand in a number of cases.

#### ***7.4.1.4 Date Flexibility***

The fourth distinctive feature of city break travel relates to the seasonality of the trips. Phase One findings clearly highlighted the even distribution of city break trips throughout the year. This less pronounced seasonal demand pattern can be largely attributed to the lack of importance that weather plays in city breaks compared to other types of holidays. For example, the findings show 17.2% of city breakers to Dublin arrived in winter months compared to just 4.3% of non city break holidaymakers. With the latter group consisting

mostly of people on main holidays, it is understandable they were more sensitive to weather conditions than city breakers. However besides weather the disparity in arrival patterns between these two groups can also be attributed to other factors. For example, the secondary nature of city breaks means most are taken outside of peak periods. Sometimes these trips are centred around events such as concerts, sports games, and exhibitions. These are generally well spread out throughout the year and as such the city break visitors who attend them contribute to the development of a year round city destination. This non seasonal demand pattern is a crucial feature and one that makes city breakers an attractive prospect for both urban planners and tourism businesses.

#### ***7.4.1.5 Destination Travel Party***

The final characteristic of city break travel concerns the composition of the travelling unit. One of the most interesting findings in this regard was the small number of travel parties that included children. Most people either travelled with a partner or with a group of friends. Phase One results highlight this, with almost 60% of city break visitors travelling to Dublin with a spouse or a partner and 18% travelling with a group of friends. By contrast just 15% came with their family. Similarly Phase Two results show travel parties to be dominated by partners and friends with just 4 groupings involving children. These results concur with previous studies which show a high proportion of urban tourists travel without children or come from childless households (Flanagan & Dunne 2003, British Tourist Authority 1988, Trinity Research 1989).

Three main factors emerged as the principal reasons why children are not well represented in these travel parties. Firstly, a high proportion of people who take city breaks do not have children at home. The findings show that many of the groups are made up of single people travelling together (friends, affinity groups, stag/hen parties, etc), couples who do not have children, e.g. 'Dinkis' (double income no kids), or couples whose children have left home, e.g. empty nesters. For all of these people, ease of mobility is a key factor in their choice of trip. They are not tied to the school calendar and as such can usually travel at any time. This allows them to avail of special travel offers which tend to be more plentiful and more rewarding during school term. Childless travellers can also usually take trips without a lot of pre planning, which means they can often make decisions more speedily and spontaneously. For such travellers city breaks represent a very attractive leisure option.

The second reason relates to people who have children, but who use the city break trip to escape the stresses and pressures of parenting. This was particularly evident in Phase Two results where a number of couples described their trip to Dublin as a chance to take a break from their children. A city break was seen as ideal in many ways for this purpose - the short stay nature of the trips along with the ease of access made travelling convenient in terms of arranging childminding. Interestingly, these people saw the city break as an adult focused holiday centred on themselves. In a number of cases it was used as a chance for couples to develop or enhance their own relationships. By contrast the main holiday was seen as a chance to spend time with their children.

The third reason for the lack of families concerns the child-unfriendly perception of Dublin as a destination. A few of the interviewees commented on the lack of things to do for children, or the difficulty in keeping them amused. Some remarked that cities in general are not suited as destinations for children, particularly small children – unlike other destinations such as sun holiday resorts that cater specifically to the needs of children.

In summary, we can see that the international city break trip has certain distinctive characteristics. These have been summarised into five main areas (5 Ds). The research has shown that city breaks tend to be discretionary in nature, and mostly last just a few days. In addition, they generally consist of couples or groups of friends who tend to be drawn from nearby or bordering markets and arrive throughout the year. Uncovering these characteristics provides a better understanding of city break trips and in particular their distinctiveness compared to other types of holidays.

Having examined these characteristics the focus will now turn to the motivation and decision making involved in taking such trips.

## 7.5 Distinctive Characteristics of the City Break Decision Process

The principal objective of this research was to gain a better understanding of the decision making process involved in taking a city break and to highlight any distinctive characteristics of the city break travel decision. The following section will address this objective, drawing on data that has emerged from the various sections of this study up to now. The city break decision will be discussed under three main sections;

- **Pre-Purchase behaviour,**
- **Choice and Purchase behaviour,**
- **Post Purchase behaviour.**

### 7.5.1 *Pre-Purchase Behaviour*

Pre-purchase behaviour involves the early stages of the city break travel decision, including the *motives* that first stimulated the desire to take the trip, the *search for information* and the subsequent *level of involvement* that was observed.

In terms of the motives for taking a city break, the findings show a number of specific Push and Pull factors that featured significantly in the travel decision.

#### 7.5.1.1 *Push Motives*

The desire to escape from something in the home environment emerged as the strongest push motive for city break visitors. Almost 40% of respondents described their motivation in such terms. The things that people were escaping varied, and ranged from the stresses of moving house to the trauma of a family bereavement. Most, however just wanted a break from the norm or to get away from the monotony of everyday life. In this regard city breaks offer a quick, convenient and relatively cheap option for people to temporarily escape their stressful or boring situations. A quick trawl through the internet for example, can sometimes throw up a travel opportunity that could provide temporary escape from the humdrum or stresses of the home environment.

In addition, the findings revealed that people's need to escape was also accompanied with a desire to do things at the destination. This included sightseeing, visiting pubs and clubs, attending events, and generally experiencing the city's attractions. In this regard a significant distinction can be seen between respondent's city break motives and their main holiday motives. For the latter, people placed a lot more emphasis on relaxation and 'recharging the batteries,' whereas the city break was clearly seen as a doing and experiencing trip. This is similar to what Fodness (1994, p.564) describes as the "utilitarian function of leisure travel," where people are escaping on the one hand but are doing so with some clear leisure goal in mind, or as he puts it "an escape to recreational or fun activities."

Similarly, differences were evident in relation to the socialising motive. Some people perceived the city break as a chance to meet and interact with the locals. Such 'external socialising' was clearly an important feature of the holiday for these visitors. By contrast this aspect did not emerge at all in people's main holiday motives. This may reflect, amongst other things, the spatial context in which the holidays take place. In other words, city breaks are more likely to bring people into contact with the host population, given that the division between locals and tourists is less obvious in a city setting. By comparison, a number of people on main holidays stay in beach or ski resorts that are often self contained and require little contact with the outside world, making the likelihood of meeting and socialising with locals a lot less likely. Also, as many of these trips are family holidays, the emphasis is more on 'internal' socialising, as the findings highlight.

One of the most interesting and distinctive city break push motives to emerge was the gift giving theme that featured in a number of trips. Although the purchasing of travel products as gifts is not new, the practice is still not commonplace, especially in relation to international trips. However, international city breaks would seem to be well suited as gift products, mainly because of the relatively low cost involved, particularly when compared to other more complicated and longer international travel products. A city break potentially offers a novel and exciting gift for people, feeding into both altruistic and self esteem motives for the giver/purchaser. This is an area that does not seem to have been fully examined either by the tourism industry or by tourism academics.



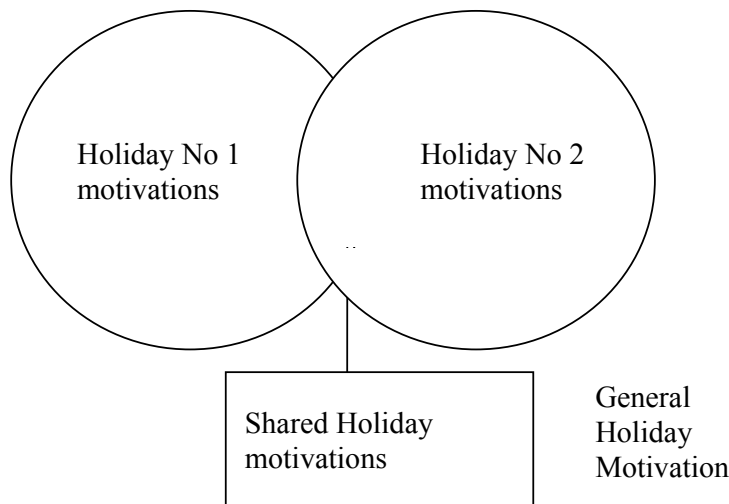
### **7.5.1.2 Pull Motives**

The findings also show that pull factors were particularly important in the city break travel decision. Factors such as ease of access and, the availability of cheap flights, were not only influential in determining the destination, but also acted, in a number of cases, as the main stimuli to take the trip. There is little doubt that these two factors have contributed greatly to Dublin's success in attracting international city break visitors. In addition, in light of heightened security restrictions, ease of access has become an increasingly appreciated feature of international travel. Destinations that can be reached with minimum effort and the least amount of difficulty will be increasingly sought by travellers in the future, particularly if this access can be provided at a low cost. For a city like Dublin, an island based destination, an affordable and extensive air route network from a wide range of gateways in Britain and mainland Europe is essential to its sustainability as a tourism destination. Such a situation currently exists, and there is no doubt that this is a major factor in the city's success as a city break destination.

Another interesting pull motive to emerge for city break trips was the attractiveness of pre-arranged events in the city. A number of people's trips centred on a range of events including concerts, sports games, exhibitions and parties. All admitted they would not have been in Dublin (at that time) if it were not for the event. It's important to note that cities, more than most other destinations, are ideally suited to benefit from such tourism, possessing as they do, most of the infrastructure (concert halls, galleries, museums, sports stadia, etc.) necessary to stage such events.

Finally, the findings also highlighted the multi-motivational nature of holiday decision-making. They show that people are commonly driven by not just one but a number of reasons to visit a destination. Importantly, the findings also confirm that travel motives vary according to the nature of the trip involved. Significant differences can be seen between the motives for taking a city break and those involved in taking a main holiday. This concurs with Bloy's (2000) assertion that people's holiday motives can change according to the trips they take. His model which was highlighted in the literature review is re-presented here to show this multi-motivational trip taking pattern (Figure 7.1).

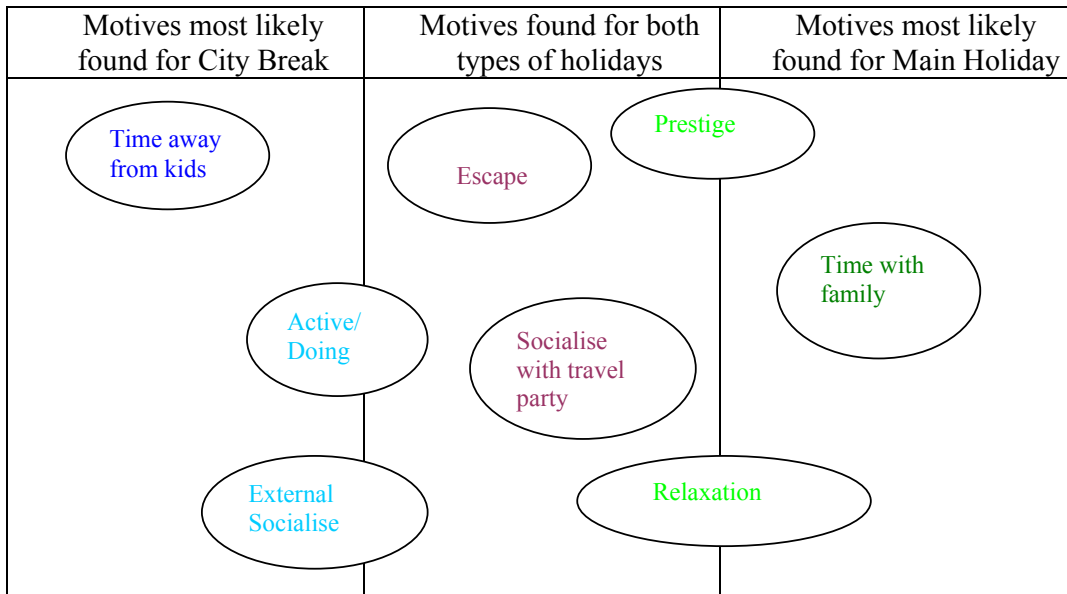
**Figure 7.1**  
**Hypothesised Intra-personal Motivational Profile for Multiple Holiday-Taking**  
**Behaviour**



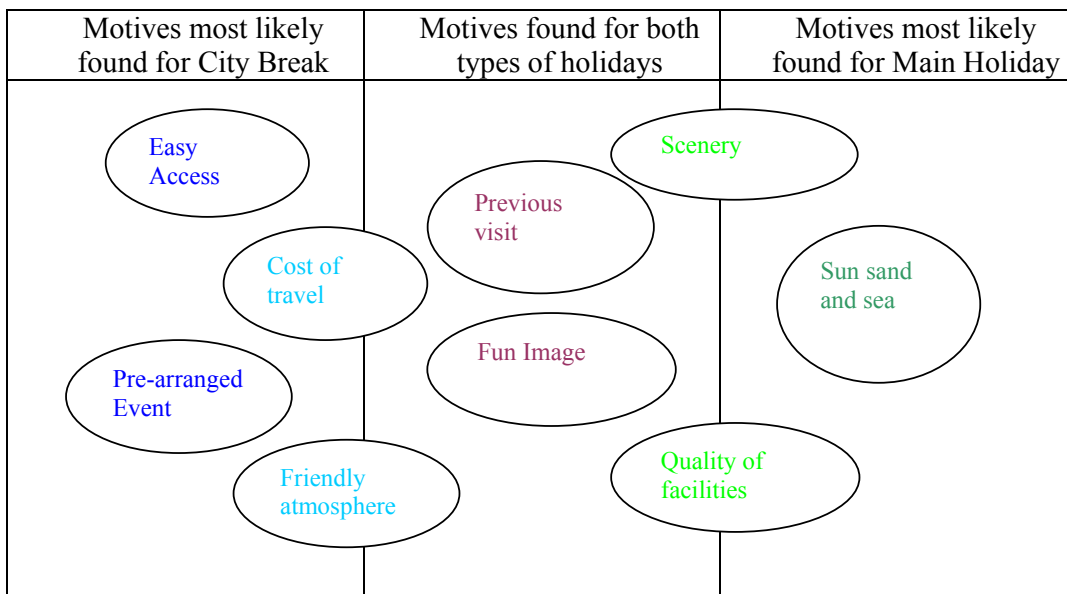
*Source: Bloy (2000)*

Taking the basic premise of this model and adapting it to the findings, it is possible to construct a useful graphical representation of the multi-motivational behaviour of respondents in relation to their city break and their last main holiday. This can be seen in the following two figures, the first (Figure 7.2) dealing with the push motives and the second (Figure 7.3) outlining the pull motives. Both figures illustrate the difference between respondent's main holiday and city break motives. The push and pull factors at the extreme ends highlight the motives that are distinctive to each particular type of trip while those in the middle tend to be common to both.

**Figure 7.2**  
**Push Motives for Multiple Trip Taking Behaviour**



**Figure 7.3**  
**Pull Motives for Multiple Trip Taking Behaviour**



This multi-motivational, multiple trip-taking view of visitors is a crucial point for destination marketing managers in particular. Too often the assumption is made, that a person has one set of motivations and seeks one type of holiday to satisfy them. For example many motivational studies like to categorise people along demographic or economic lines such as age or income level. They suggest that people of a certain age group or income level will have similar motives. Travel motives, unfortunately, are not that simple. For example, one of the interview respondents, a thirty something female, described taking two holidays in the space of a few months – one was the city break to Dublin and the other was a family holiday to Turkey. However the motives for both trips were very different. The city break, which she took with some friends, was mostly influenced by escape and hedonistic motives, while the main holiday was primarily stimulated by the need for relaxation and internal socialising with family. In such a case demographic characteristics (such as her age or life-cycle stage) provided limited guidance to travel motives. The nature of the holiday, as the results show, can be a much better indicator of motivation. It's important for destination marketers to be cognisant of this, particularly in terms of their marketing strategies and planning.

Having looked at the distinctive aspects of city break motives, the discussion moves on to the next element of the pre-purchase stage - information search.

#### ***7.5.1.3 Information Search***

A number of significant findings stand out from the data in relation to the city break information search. Firstly, the range of information sources that people consulted was quite narrow. The interviews show city breakers on average considered 2.5 sources of information prior to purchase (including memory of previous visits). This is a relatively small number for an international holiday purchase. The findings indicate a search pattern that focused mostly on sources that were both immediate and close at hand. This can be seen in the data from Phase Two relating to direction of search. Most people consulted the internet and family and friends – sources that they could access easily. Very few sought out intermediaries, at least not in bricks and mortar form. Phase One results also found a similar search pattern, with the internet being cited as the principal source of information, followed by friends and family. In addition, these sources, along with memory of a previous visit, were described as being the most influential in terms of the decision to travel to Dublin. The strong influence of friends and family is understandable given the element of trust associated with such sources. The exact influence of the internet on the other hand is less clear – mainly because of the variety

of sites and the different types of information present. This is reflected in the findings from Phase One, which show a marked difference between the influence of an internet site and a special offer found on the internet. The data show just 5% of city breakers considered an internet site to be a major influence on the decision to visit Dublin. However, a much larger 33% felt a special flight offer (which for most people was found on the internet) was considered a major influence. In other words, people were less influenced by particular sites on the internet than by the special deals which those sites offered.

#### ***7.5.1.4 Level of Involvement***

In terms of the amount of time and effort put into the purchase decision, the findings highlighted some interesting points. The literature indicates that travel service products possess certain functional, financial, physical, psychological, and social risks for consumers (Lovelock & Wright 1999; Teare 1992). It is the desire to reduce these risks that causes people to engage in much pre-purchase planning and information search effort. The results show that city breaks were seen by most respondents to possess few of these risk factors and as a result, required less planning and researching. However, a significant number of people also showed similar low involvement behaviour with their main holiday. Some main holidays, for example, were ‘repurchases,’ or what Hawkins et al. (1986) refer to as destination-loyal decisions. One couple for example, took their main holiday in the same resort in North Wales every year. Thus, for them, decision making (as much as there was any) centered mostly on choosing dates and fixing travel arrangements. By contrast, the city break to Dublin represented quite an adventurous trip. Other people’s main holidays were last minute choices, with little or no planning or searching – this often reflected the decision making style and personality traits of the people involved. In general, factors such as travel party, nature of destination, duration, and organisation of trip (i.e. package or independent) tended to have a strong influence on the level of involvement in all holiday decisions. This highlights the importance of the circumstances and situational factors associated with each individual trip and concurs with Decrop & Snelder’s (2004) findings of Belgian holidaymakers which indicate a rather haphazard and flexible trip planning behaviour pattern.

### **7.5.2 Choice and Purchase Behaviour**

The choice behaviour of city break visitors showed some notable characteristics. One of the most surprising factors from Phase Two was the lack of alternatives considered by the majority of city breakers. Nearly 60% of interviewees chose Dublin without considering any alternative. Many city breaks were characterised by unexpected travel opportunities that presented themselves such as, a special flight offer, or an invitation to join an organised trip to a pre-planned event (sports game, concert, stag/hen party). Such scenarios did not generally involve alternatives and therefore usually came down to a, “shall I go or not?” type choice. The outcome of such decisions was often heavily influenced by personal circumstances (time, money, responsibilities, etc.) that people faced at the time.

#### **7.5.2.1 Evaluating Alternatives**

For those who did contemplate alternatives, the range of options considered was quite small. Just 13 other destinations were considered in total, with Prague, Amsterdam, and Glasgow being the most commonly mentioned. These cities probably represent Dublin’s main competition for city break demand. Interestingly, all but two of the alternative destinations mentioned were cities. This seems to indicate people’s foremost desire to visit a city as opposed to another type of destination. It’s likely that cities fitted in better with the length and nature of the trip that was being taken. Respondents commonly referred to the convenience of cities as destinations, where direct access without the need for further onward travel was a big advantage, particularly when the duration of the trip was relatively short.

In addition to the narrow range of alternatives mentioned by city break interviewees, the results also show people’s individual consideration sets to be quite small, particularly when compared to other studies (Ryan, 2002; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). With an average set size of just 1.67, the city break decision was notable by how little evaluating activity was undertaken during the choice process. Moreover, there was very little sign of the funnelling process which most of the traditional choice set models suggest. For example, no evidence emerged of extensive decision making that involved a sequential, multi-stage choice process, consisting of an early and late consideration set, as suggested by Um & Crompton (1992). On the contrary, the city break choice process was generally characterised by simple, low involvement decision making that in many cases was spontaneous and opportunistic. This is similar to the “opportunistic decision strategies” that Decrop & Snelders (2004, p.1008)

found in their study of Belgian tourists, and which, as they point out, “departs from most existing models which depict a bounded rational, problem solving vacationer.”

Where alternatives were considered by respondents, the findings show both compensatory and non-compensatory heuristics being employed in the decision process. The choice of Dublin was most frequently influenced by the cost of flying and the ease of access to the city. These two attributes, which also featured prominently as pull motives, were central to most people’s decision to select Dublin. The cost of the flight was particularly persuasive, with people commonly using compensatory rules in relation to this factor. This was evident in a number of cases where respondents at first considered other cities, but ended up choosing Dublin following a ‘trade-off strategy’ in which the cheap flight compensated for other comparative weaknesses. This highlights again just how crucial cheap air access is for a destination like Dublin and concurs with recent commentary that highlights the strong correlation between low cost flights and the growth of city breaks (see WTM Report 2005).

For Dublin, the continued expansion of Ryanair and the transformation of Aer Lingus into a low cost carrier have further facilitated people’s ability to access the city cheaply. In addition, the plan to build a new terminal at Dublin airport to ease congestion and allow quicker throughput is another positive development. However, it is important to note that cheap air access is not always guaranteed. Airline prices are prone to a certain degree of volatility as events in recent years have shown. For example, the introduction of fuel surcharges and new baggage fees have added to the cost of flying with many airlines. Such charges have been experienced by visitors to Dublin in recent times. This represents a worry for the city’s tourism sector as increased access costs may result in people either flying somewhere cheaper or not flying at all. Looking forward, there is also the significant possibility of ‘green taxes’ being levied on airlines in the coming years. This would further add to the cost of air transport and potentially impact on the numbers flying in the future.

The ‘ease of access’ attribute, also emerged as being highly influential in the decision to travel to Dublin. The relative effortlessness with which people could access the city, particularly from their local airport, was a very important factor for a number of city breakers. Many of these used the *elimination by aspect* rule, in which they applied a cut-off point that involved the decision to only consider destinations served from their local airport. Such behaviour shows the importance people place on convenience in terms of a city break

trip, mainly due to time constraints. It also highlights the city break market potential of regions within an hour or two of airports that serve a particular destination. Strategic targeting of such regions could prove quite fruitful for city tourism marketing managers. The importance of ease of access is probably best reflected in a recently published series of guidebooks by Cadogan, titled *Flying Visits*. The guide books focus on cities served by budget airlines and specifically target the time-pressed short break traveller.

In addition to these two important attributes the decision to come to Dublin was also influenced by the prospect of fun. Much of this fun centred around visiting pubs and clubs. Phase One findings showed the extent to which pubs were visited, with 79% stating they had visited or intended to visit a pub during their city break. The city's lively atmosphere was seen as an attractive feature with people regularly referring to the buzz and the 'craic.' Interestingly however, a couple of people found the pub scene a bit contrived and off-putting. One respondent registered disappointment with the lack of authenticity with many of Dublin's pubs, "*I thought they'd be more Irish ...I've been to pubs in Glasgow that are more Irish,*" (Peter, Leeds). This respondent felt many of the pubs were too big and without character. Another young couple found the Temple Bar area to be somewhat overpowering and "*a bit scary.*" These are notable examples as they show not all young people want large trendy bars – some are seeking a more traditional experience. Interestingly however, in keeping with the multi-motivational trip taking theme emerging in this research, the former respondent did point out, "*maybe if you came on a stag weekend it would be different.*" In other words, pubs that are viewed as unauthentic on a trip with one's partner, might be viewed as perfectly adequate on a stag trip. This is an important point as it shows how people's perceptions and behaviour can alter according to the characteristics of a trip.

In addition to pubs, people also sought fun in the city's attractions and entertainment venues. Phase One findings showed sightseeing to be the number one activity engaged in by city breakers and almost all interview respondents referred to visiting some attractions on their trip. People particularly enjoyed the Guinness Storehouse and the National Museum. An interesting point to note here is the extent to which the fun element in Dublin is focused largely on adults. Attractions such as breweries, distilleries, and libraries (Book of Kells) have limited appeal for children, particularly young children. In addition, entertainment that is centred on pubs and music sessions will obviously do little to excite or engage such



visitors. This point is reflected in the research findings which show a notable absence of children from most travel parties.

#### **7.5.2.2 Booking Behaviour**

In terms of how the city break trip was purchased, a number of notable points emerged from the findings. Firstly, city breaks are, in general, uncomplicated travel products - 83% consisted of transport and accommodation elements only. This is a crucial factor, as the simplicity of city breaks is central to their popularity. Having to research other elements of a trip such as transfers, kids clubs, car hire, etc., can be time consuming and undesirable for someone who is contemplating an unplanned discretionary trip.

The uncomplicated nature of city break trips is also an influence on the timing of people's purchase. The findings indicate a last minute booking behaviour pattern, showing the majority of people purchasing their city breaks less than a month before their trip. This highlights the spontaneous and in some cases impulsive aspect of these trips. Unlike main holidays which frequently follow an established annual decision making pattern (with long decision times), city breaks can be conceived, researched and booked in a matter of days or even hours. This is often due to the influence of situational factors pertaining to people's lives at a particular time. The findings revealed a number of such factors at play in people's decision to visit Dublin. These factors were quite varied and occasionally unique, but in all cases a city break ended up being the outcome. In some instances the city break was the result of an opportunity that presented itself, in others it was borne out of a necessity to escape particular circumstances people found themselves in.

The internet usually played a significant part in these relatively quick travel decisions. Interview respondents, for example, were three times more likely to book their city break online compared to their main holiday. There is little doubt that people have become more comfortable with purchasing travel products online, particularly with regard to discretionary trips. Indeed the internet features significantly throughout the whole city break decision making process. People relied greatly on it for searching, evaluating and booking their holidays. However, it should be noted in a few cases people expressed a certain degree of frustration with the internet. One respondent, for example, commented on the hassle he had searching around different sites and trying to match dates and times for flights and accommodation. In contrast, for his main holiday he visited a travel agent and booked a sun

package holiday in a few minutes with one single purchase. This is an interesting point as it shows not everyone feels the internet provides the easiest route for booking a holiday. On the other hand, an alternative view expressed by others related to the feeling of satisfaction which booking online can bring. Some people felt a great sense of achievement in making it “all match up.”

Overall, for the majority, the internet represented the method of choice for searching and booking their city break. In fact many continued to use the internet even after bookings were made and in some cases even after departure. The significance of this medium cannot be overestimated and is almost certainly not reflected adequately in previous decision making models.

### **7.5.3 Post Purchase Behaviour**

Findings in relation to the post purchase stage of the travel decision threw up some interesting insights on both of the main areas examined, i.e. *image* and *experience* of Dublin.

#### **7.5.3.1 Visitor Image of Dublin**

In terms of image, the most commonly cited prior image of Dublin was that of a fun city with a good atmosphere. This is of course good news for the city’s tourism marketers, as fun is a powerful image to have associated with any destination. The only downside to this may be the extent to which this association is linked to pubs, drinking and general revelry. In the late 90s Dublin experienced a large influx of stag and hen parties which resulted in a number of problems for the city’s tourism businesses. The industry took measures to counter this and to date a much more sustainable level of this form of tourism has existed. It is important for the city’s tourism managers to ensure a proper balance is achieved between those whose notion of fun is centred solely on drinking and those who have a more rounded view of having fun (which may include pubs and clubs, but also concerts, attractions, theatre etc.).

Another significant finding was the lack of any prior image of Dublin by a number of city break visitors. Five interview respondents claimed to have no discernible prior impression of Dublin before they arrived. This obviously raises the question - why? To answer this we need to look more closely at what constitutes a destination’s image. Gunn (1988) states that an area’s image exists on two levels; organic image is the product of non-commercial sources: newspapers, books, and for destinations it would include, history, politics, natural and human

catastrophes, etc. Induced image is the result of promotion and advertising efforts and therefore is of primary interest to tourism marketers (Sussmann & Unel, 1999). If the lack of a prior image of Dublin relates to the latter then the tourism bodies may need to question their communication strategies, particularly in the UK. If it relates more to the former, then it will be far more difficult to change as this is a result of a more long term learning process – one which commercial tourism bodies have limited influence on.

A somewhat similar situation was found with regard to people's image of Dublin as a cultural city. The interview findings showed the number of people who described their prior image of Dublin in cultural terms was quite small (3). The extent to which this is a result of the trip being a city break is debatable. Some may argue that city breakers to Dublin are less likely to be interested in culture. However, the results from Phase One seem to dispute this. For example, when city breakers and non city breakers were compared in relation to their rating of Dublin as a cultural city, no significant difference was found. In addition, the findings with regard to visiting museums show no difference between both groups. The underlying trend seems to be that for most visitors (both city break and non city break) Dublin is seen more as a fun and lively city than a cultural one.

Finally, this lack of prior knowledge and awareness of Dublin shown by many city breakers in the findings, was probably aided by the limited information search that was undertaken by them. One wonders if these people would have taken a main family holiday with a similar lack of knowledge or prior image of the destination.

#### **7.5.3.2 *Visitor Experience of Dublin***

Luckily for the city's tourism industry, the vast majority of people expressed satisfaction with their trip to Dublin. Phase One results showed city break visitors rating Dublin 8 out of 10 in terms of their overall satisfaction with their visit. Similar satisfaction was recorded in the interviews, where for most, the fun and lively atmosphere that they envisaged prior to arrival, was delivered. Friendliness, although not really featuring in people's initial image of Dublin, was cited as something many respondents had experienced. The negative comments which people expressed were similar to those discovered in previous research (Flanagan & Dunne, 2003), i.e., high prices, litter, and congestion. These are all issues that have been previously documented but which nonetheless persist. The cost of drink and food in particular were highlighted as negative aspects to the visitor experience.

As mentioned, the child unfriendly nature of the city was also an issue. A few people thought there was little for children to do, and also that some establishments were not very welcoming of children.

However one of the most interesting challenges facing the tourism industry in Dublin relates to the new multicultural appearance of the city. Although generally positive, the most striking aspect of this was the number of people who were completely unaware of the number of foreign nationals living and working in the city. This does bring into question the image which Dublin's promotional bodies currently project and whether or not this is an accurate one. There is also the issue of tourists being able to meet Dubliners in Dublin. One of the distinctive features of city break motives was the desire for 'external socialising,' or meeting the locals. If people are not made aware of the ethnic diversity of the city's population, both in terms of service personnel and residents, there may be some surprise and even disappointment after arrival. It's important therefore, that Dublin's new multicultural identity is acknowledged and communicated through the city's marketing efforts. At the same time it is also important to ensure that the city's unique character and friendliness is not compromised or diluted.

## **7.6 Rethinking the Travel Decision Making Process**

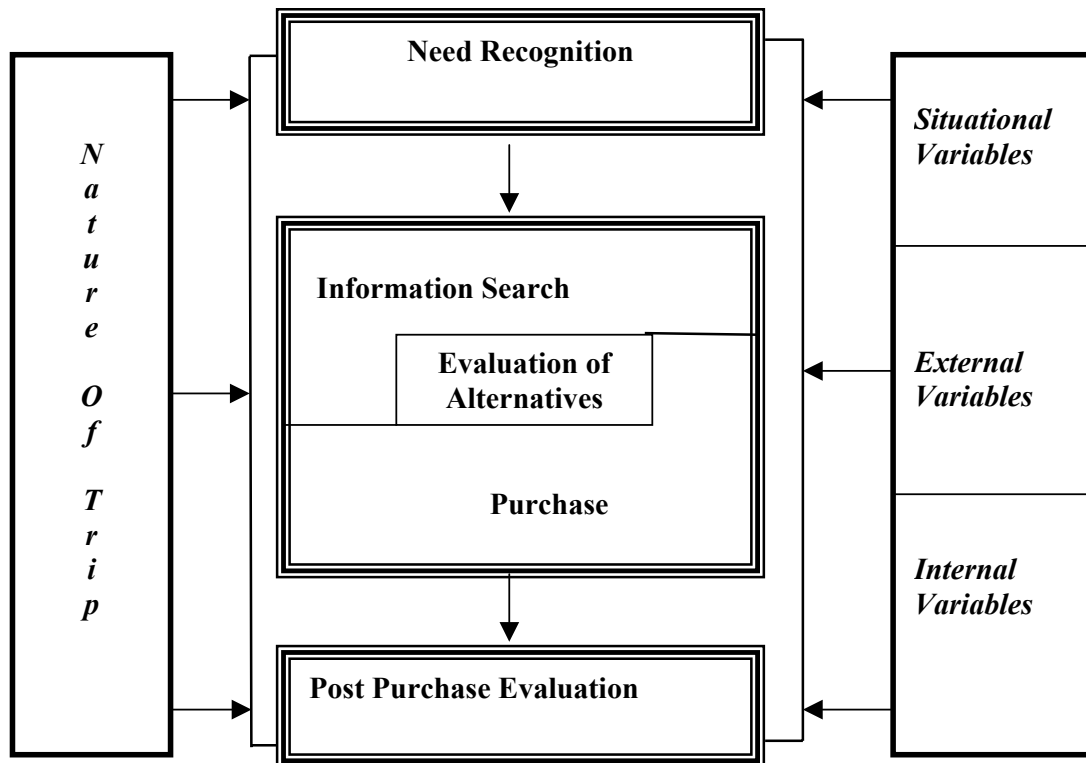
The previous sections in this chapter have addressed four of the five main aims of the research. This has resulted in a greater understanding of both city break travellers and city break decision making. However, before addressing the final aim, the discussion will temporarily switch focus. This is done in order to use the knowledge gained up to now to construct a specific city break travel decision model – one that reflects the main themes and concepts that have emerged from the research.

There is little doubt that consumer decision making research has seen tremendous activity over the past thirty years. But, as Sirakaya & Woodside (2005, p.816) point out, "no single unifying theory has emerged across disciplines to describe, explain, or predict consumer decisions, and it seems unlikely that individual decision processes fit neatly into a single decision theory." Most of the decision making models developed for the tourism sector have been adaptations of the 'grand models.' However, as these 'grand models' were originally

developed for manufactured products their application to tourism services is limited. Therefore a different perspective on the travel decision making process is needed. Although various researchers (Um and Crompton, 1990, Woodside & Lyonski, 1989) address this need, their general models fail to move beyond the main concepts of the 'grand models,' (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Most still assume the decision maker to be rationalistic, selecting the travel service that offers the greatest utility (e.g. best value).

However in reality, and as this research has shown, travellers can often be irrational and be much more influenced by emotional elements such as promotional messages, and the influences of family and friends. The traditional models also assume the decision process to be sequential in nature, following a funnelling pattern where the decision maker goes through a variety of alternatives in a systematic way until a final choice is eventually reached. It is assumed that people follow this logical sequence in a rational functional manner. However, because of the subjective nature of decision making and the adaptability of the consumer we should, as Decrop & Snelders (2004, p.1011) advise, "assume that there is not just one but more possible types of vacation decision making processes." They interestingly give the example of the growing phenomenon of last-minute booking behaviour as a factor that is not taken into account by traditional models. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007, p.77) make a similar point when they suggest most of the major models predate recent developments in tourist behaviour such as "last-minute spontaneous purchases" and the "growing use of the internet and multi-media systems that can be accessed from the tourists own home. In addition, Hudson (1999, p.29) makes an important observation on the traditional models when he points out, "they are stereotypical and generalised whereas, in reality the decision process will vary significantly among different groups of tourists." This is a valid point, and one that this research supports. For example, city breakers as a distinct group of tourists show some behaviour characteristics in their decision making that do not fit many of the traditional models. These characteristics, which have emerged from the research and have been highlighted throughout this study, show the city break travel decision to be different from previously outlined models. Therefore, it is necessary and appropriate to develop a new model that reflects these differences. Such a model is outlined in Figure 7.4, and the following section will explain the rationale behind its design.

**Figure 7.4**  
**City Break Decision Making Model**



### **7.6.1 A New Model for the City Break Decision**

One of the first things to note in relation to this model is the lack of a phased, sequential structure to the decision process. It consists of just three distinct horizontal boxes reflecting a much flatter appearance compared to other models. The first of these boxes represents the need recognition stage. This is the starting point for most models but in this case it is necessary to make a few important observations. The recognition of the need to take a city break often stems from specific situational factors in people's lives. The interview findings have highlighted a variety of these, ranging from a personal tragedy to a lucky windfall. These points proved very important in stimulating the initial need to take a trip. Such situational factors are hardly acknowledged or, have been marginalised in the traditional models (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). The desire to get away, to experience a change of scene, seems particularly important in the need to take a city break. People find such trips ideal vehicles to bring some novelty and diversion to the hum drum routine of daily life. In addition, the initial generic decision of whether or not to take the trip is of particular

importance. As noted already, the city break trip is usually a discretionary one and therefore dissimilar to many main holiday decisions. The latter often consist of a preordained annual ritual with the “will we go?” element already decided. By contrast, city break opportunities often occur out of the blue without much warning. Therefore, the initial generic decision (“will I go”) is often the most crucial aspect of the decision process. Indeed, as Decrop & Snelders (2004) point out, the generic decision does not always follow a rational decision making process sequence. For example, people sometimes have an idea to take a trip, check out alternatives, select the one they want, but may still not have made the generic decision to go. This is often the case with discretionary trips such as short breaks where there is a lot of ‘fantasising.’ A distinction therefore needs to be made between generic intention and the actual generic decision.

The second box in the city break model is slightly unusual in that the information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase phases are grouped together. Although the information search does come first, it intentionally runs into the evaluation and purchase phases. This reflects the research findings, which showed a number of city breakers engaging in all three of these activities together in quite an unsystematic and at times haphazard manner. In some cases, the evaluation of alternatives was bypassed and people went straight to the purchase stage, as represented by the right side of the box. In other situations, people searched for information and evaluated alternatives simultaneously before purchasing (left half of the box). Without doubt, the presence of the internet is one of the main reasons for this decision making pattern. People can search out deals, evaluate them, and make bookings, all with just a few clicks of a mouse. The importance of the internet, at all stages of the decision process, is a strong theme emerging throughout the research findings. This is a crucial point, as most of the traditional models (and certainly all those over 10 years old) do not reflect the importance and influence of the internet in contemporary travel decision making. As Ballantyne (2002, p.235) points out, the internet, more than any other, is “an obvious source of brand information and brand comparison for travel and tourism related products.” In many ways the internet cuts through the multistage decision models of old, and reflects the modern reality of people taking discretionary trips in situations where they increasingly lack consumer resources such as time, attention, and cognitive processing ability. The internet represents the ultimate decision making tool for the cash rich, time poor, modern traveller.

The final box represents the post purchase evaluation stage and is similar to most other models. This represents the tourist's reflection on the purchase decision they have just made and usually involves comparing service experience with prior expectations. This generally results in an overall feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service. The service is evaluated from the moment the consumer has made the purchase commitment. The city breaker will make judgements on the service providers they encounter as well as the destination itself. Interestingly, because city breaks are mostly put together by individuals themselves, there is no third party to blame if things go wrong such as a travel agent or tour operator.

In addition to the three main boxes of the decision model, a number of factors are also represented in the boxes on either side of the horizontal spine and feeding into it. These are the factors that have been found to be influential in the city break decision and have been categorised into four groups; *internal variables*, *external variables*, *nature of trip*, and *situational factors*. Some of these are similar to those suggested by Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) but have been adapted to reflect the specifics of the city break travel decision.

- a) The **Internal variables** refer to the personal aspects of the consumer such as, motivation, image, personality, lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs, and lifecycle stage.
- b) **External variables** include, constraints, pull factors of a destination, marketing mix, influences of family and reference groups, culture and subcultures, social class and household-related variables.
- c) The third factor is the **Nature of the Intended Trip**. This is very significant in the context of the city break decision as it refers to features such as travel party size, distance, time, and duration of trip. As previously discussed in this chapter these are all crucial factors in terms of influencing the city break decision.
- d) The final group refers to **Situational Factors** and although these could technically come under external variables, it was felt their importance to the city break travel decision merited their own distinct grouping. These include a wide range of factors which are "particular to a time and place of observation, ... and which have a demonstrable and systematic effect on current behaviour," (Belk 1975, 158). This research has highlighted many such situational variables, several of which have had a strong bearing on the decision to travel to Dublin. For example, one respondent faced a situation where holiday entitlements would be lost if he did not use them. A trip to



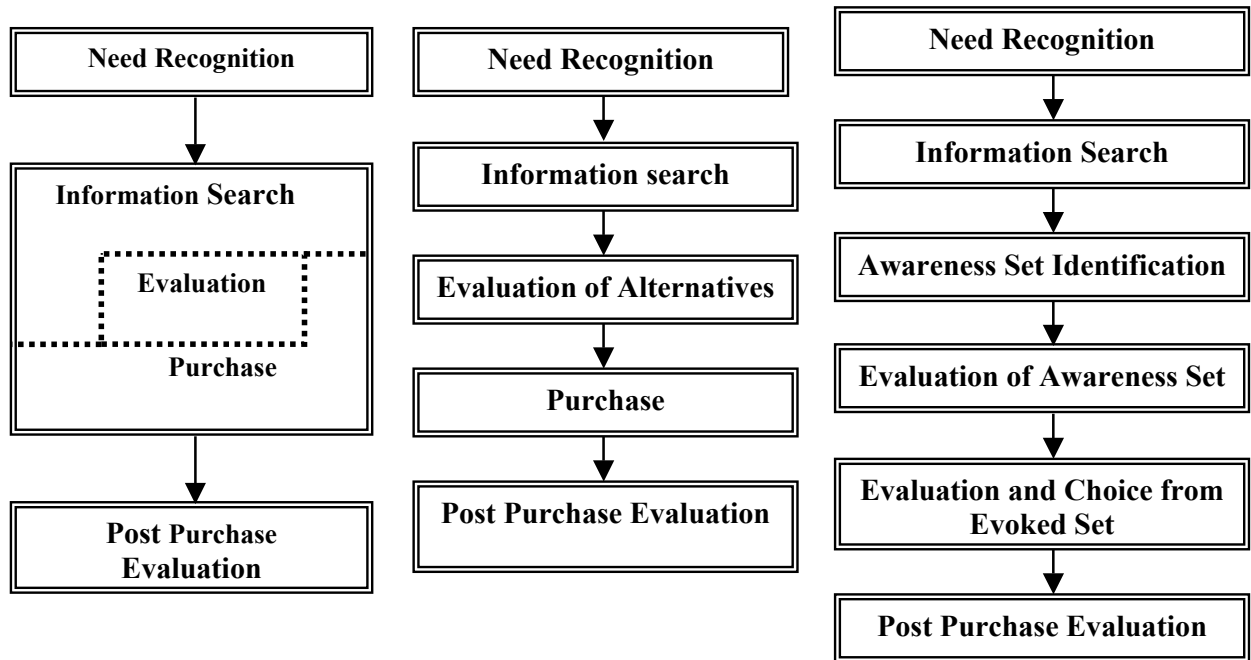
Dublin was promptly undertaken. However if the necessity to use holiday entitlements was not there, this person would not have taken the city break.

All four of these factors represent the principal influencers of the overall decision process. The extent of each ones influence varies from case to case but can be felt at any time or stage in the process.

## **7.7 Type of Trip as a Determinant of Decision Making Process**

This section of the chapter will address the fifth and final aim of the research - the influence of type of trip on the decision making process. As already seen, the traditional models have problems accommodating the characteristics of the city break travel decision. This is primarily because they fail to recognise a non systematic approach to decision making, where the process is not necessarily undertaken by a sole individual in distinctive stages, and where emotional elements are just as relevant as functional ones. In addition, traditional models fail to acknowledge the importance of the nature of the trip being undertaken. The idea of one, all encompassing travel decision making model that represents every type of trip is unrealistic. Along with Sirakaya & Woodside (2005) who claim unique approaches for modelling tourist decisions is long overdue, most scholars see the need today for a range of models that are reflective of the differences that exist in travel decision making - models that can distinguish the specific nuances and characteristics of particular decision situations. As this research has shown, the type of trip a person takes can have a significant impact on the kind of decision process they engage in. This can be seen in Figure 7.5, where different decision making processes are highlighted on a continuum, ranging from low involvement / limited problem solving (similar to the city break model) on the left, to high involvement / extensive problem solving (similar to the choice sets approach) on the right. In the middle is the standard 5 stage process, commonly cited for non-routinised purchases. This model posits that a person's decision making behaviour will be heavily influenced by the specific characteristics of each trip, the variations of which determine where along the continuum the decision will be located. These characteristics are represented by the 5Ds as mentioned previously to define the city break trip and are shown at the bottom of the model in Figure 7.5.

**Figure 7.5 - Travel Decision Making Models by Type of Trip**



<i>Short</i> ←	-----	<i>Duration</i>	-----	► <i>Long</i>
<i>Near/High</i> ←	-----	<i>Distance/Familiarity</i>	-----	► <i>Fair/Low</i>
<i>High</i> ←	-----	<i>Discretionary Nature</i>	-----	► <i>Low</i>
<i>Anytime</i> ←	-----	<i>Date Flexibility</i>	-----	► <i>Seasonal</i>
<i>Adult Focus</i> ←	-----	<i>Destination Travel Party</i>	-----	► <i>Family Focus</i>

The decision making behaviour as presented on the left side of the model, represents low involvement behaviour. This means the risk people attach to their holiday purchase is perceived to be low, due mainly to the belief that if things go wrong or don't turn out as planned, the consequences (financial, emotional, etc.) are not felt to be that significant.

In terms of Figure 7.5, low involvement decision making is deemed to be more likely when the trip characteristics (5Ds) show more towards the left side of the continuum. In other words when;

- the trip is short in length (**Duration**)
- the intended destination is close and/or familiar (**Distance / Familiar**),
- the trip is an unplanned supplemental or secondary holiday, with a short decision time (**Discretionary**),
- the departure time is not tied to seasonal factors such as school holidays, allowing for opportunistic travel behaviour (**Date Flexibility**),
- the trip only involves adults without children (**Destination Travel Party**)

It should be noted that ‘familiarity’ mentioned in the second characteristic includes both general familiarity that usually comes from being located near a destination (e.g. awareness of its culture, food, currency, etc.) and also familiarity that may arise from prior experience (previous visitation) of a destination. The latter case in particular can have quite a significant influence on the level of involvement. As Teare (1994, p.21) points out, “consumers who have limited prior experience are inclined to rely more heavily on currently available information,” while those with product familiarity tend “to be more selective in searching information.”

By contrast, the other side of the continuum consists of high involvement / extensive problem solving decision making. This relates to people’s higher perception of risk (financial, emotional, etc.) in relation to the holiday purchase. This behaviour will be more evident if the trip has the following characteristics;

- it’s for a long duration (one week or more),
- the destination is a long distance away and/or is unfamiliar,
- the holiday is an established annual ritual (i.e. not discretionary), allowing the traveller plenty of decision time,
- the participants have little date flexibility (usually confined to school holidays) – limiting the ability to travel on impulse,
- the destination travel party involves children

In relation to the third factor (annual ritual holiday), it is important to note that although the generic decision of whether or not to take a trip has already been established, a significant number of subsequent decisions may still need to be made. For example, choices in relation

to type of trip, where to go, where to stay, what to do, and any specific requirements of the travel party, may still have to be made – all of which add to the extensiveness of the decision making process.

However, it is important to point out that in situations where the annual ritual holiday involves a standard package or entails a repeat visit to a familiar destination the decision making may become more routine with lower involvement.

City break decisions generally demonstrate a structure similar to that on the left side of Figure 7.5, while main family holidays (particularly non-routine) tend to be closer to the model on the right.

However these two scenarios are extremes. In reality, most trips will tend to fall somewhere between these two. The exact location will largely be determined by the specifics of each of the characteristics outlined. Trips that lean towards the left side of the continuum represent less risky travel purchases, in other words, the economic and psychological risks involved tend to be low. The opposite is the case with trips on the right side of the continuum where the scale, cost, and complexity of the holidays increase the risk element for the purchaser. The degree of risk is a crucial factor in determining the level of involvement and extensiveness of problem solving engaged in by travellers.

### ***7.7.1 Usage of the Type of Trip Model***

The ‘type of trip’ model (Figure 7.5) represents a useful framework for tourism marketers and planners. By assessing their customer’s trip characteristics (using the continuum outlined in the model), it is possible for tourism providers to estimate the likely level of involvement they use when purchasing. This is obviously valuable information from a marketing point of view and should help tourism businesses to better focus their marketing efforts.

In terms of the usage of the model going forward, it is important to make a few observations. Firstly, it is possible that changes to the model will be made in the future as other influencing trip characteristics are added or become more relevant. The 5Ds is not an exhaustive list of the factors that influence the type of decision making behaviour travellers engage in. There is little doubt that other trip characteristics are also at play - however those indicated in this model represent the most pertinent factors relating to this research.

In addition, given current trends, it is likely there will be increased emphasis, in the future, on low involvement decision making behaviour, as represented on the left side of the model. With the increasing ability of people to access information and make bookings through the internet, the amount of time and effort people are putting into decision making seems to be generally decreasing. Moreover, with the world psychologically getting smaller through the regularity with which people are travelling, the decision making behaviour of travellers in the future is likely to increasingly reflect a more low involvement behaviour pattern.

### **7.7.2 Value of the Research Findings**

The findings in this chapter provide insights and knowledge that have significant implications in the field of tourism. In an era of constantly changing travel patterns and trip taking behaviour, it has become more important than ever to understand tourists' motivations and consumer behaviour. Current knowledge of visitor decision making is crucial for tourism businesses and marketing organisations in order to ensure they continue to provide products that reflect the requirements of contemporary travellers. City breaks are at the forefront of this changing travel trend in Europe and as such these findings should be a timely addition to existing knowledge on this subject.

However, as well as the tourism sector, the insights presented in this chapter also have implications in the wider social world. The findings highlight the changing perception of leisure travel – with people increasingly seeing holidays as a necessity rather than a luxury. The accessibility and attainability of city breaks as a holiday option clearly reinforces this trend. The ability of city breaks to provide a quick, short escape from the routine of daily life shows them to be fulfilling a significant role in today's cash rich, time poor society. In addition, the findings highlight some interesting themes in relation to the role of a holiday - particularly in terms of its social function. For example, some holidays were viewed as opportunities to build on personal relationships, often between partners; while others provided a more hedonistic role in which the holiday was viewed as a chance to regress or behave in a manner which would be socially out of character in the home environment. Such differences are interesting to observe and highlight the value of viewing holiday-taking in its wider social context.

Overall therefore the findings provide a greater understanding of city break trip taking and ultimately contribute to knowledge both in the field of tourism studies and the wider social world – a world in which leisure and recreation are playing an increasingly important role.

## **7.8 Summary**

This chapter has drawn together the principal findings from the research in order to address the main aims of the study. Each of these aims has been discussed in turn resulting in a number of significant themes and concepts being highlighted.

The discussion in relation to the city break phenomenon has shown how cities have emerged as distinct destination brands in contemporary travel, and how in some cases they have eclipsed national brands. Cheap air access has been central to this phenomenon with low cost carriers often the key success factor for many city break destinations.

The research has shown city breakers to exhibit some distinctive characteristics compared to other city visitors. The most obvious one relates to nationality – with almost 80% of Dublin's visitors coming from Britain. In addition, the findings show a more 'democratic' aspect to this type of recreation with city breakers drawn from a wider spectrum of society compared to other city holidaymakers.

The trips themselves displayed a number of distinctive features that can be classified as the 5 Ds – duration, distance, date flexibility, discretionary nature, and destination travel party. The findings in this regard showed city break trips to be generally short in duration (usually less than three nights) involving mostly short haul flights from neighbouring countries. In addition, they tended to be secondary trips that people often used to supplement a main holiday. They were also likely to be taken throughout the year and involved mostly adults travelling together.

In relation to motivations and decision making the research findings revealed some notable themes and concepts. The motivation for city breaks mostly stemmed from a desire to escape the pressures or boredom of the home environment. Unlike other leisure trips which often

involve escape for relaxation, city breaks were mostly seen as an “escape to recreational or fun activities” (Fodness, 1994, p.564).

Both cost and ease of access proved particularly pertinent as pull motives for city breakers. Cheap flights and the convenience of access from local airports emerged as crucial factors in the choice of Dublin.

In relation to information search the findings showed city breakers to engage in low levels of search behaviour. The internet was shown to dominate the direction of the search with many people using few other information sources in their decision process. In general, the level of involvement was quite low, mainly due to people perceiving the city break purchase to be low risk.

The choice process was notable for the lack of evaluation engaged in by most city breakers. Phase Two findings revealed the majority of respondents (60%) considered no other alternative to Dublin. Many of these represented opportunistic or impulsive decisions, where special offers or unplanned opportunities acted as the main stimuli. Where alternatives were considered, the results show both compensatory and non-compensatory decision rules being employed. The choice of Dublin was most frequently influenced by the cost of flying and the ease of access to the city (similar to the main pull motives already mentioned).

The internet again featured strongly in relation to people’s booking behaviour with interview respondents showing a much higher tendency to book their city break online compared to their main holiday. In addition, the findings indicated a last minute booking behaviour pattern, with the majority of people purchasing their city breaks less than a month before their trip.

In general people were quite satisfied with their city break purchase. Ninety percent of interviewees stated the holiday had matched or exceeded expectations. Most felt that the fun and lively image which they had envisaged was delivered - although a significant number failed to register any image of Dublin prior to their visit. Interestingly, many cited friendliness as a significant factor in their enjoyment of the holiday, possibly reflecting the external socialising that emerged earlier as a motive for visiting.

In light of these significant findings a new city break travel decision model was constructed – one that reflected the principal themes and concepts uncovered in the research. The model illustrates the particular stages, elements, and influences involved in the city break decision and represents a more accurate and contemporary depiction of the choice process.

The findings also showed the importance of type of trip as an indicator of decision making behaviour. The specific characteristics of a trip such as, its duration, distance and so on, were posited as being influential in determining the level of involvement and the amount of problem solving engaged in. This is illustrated in a model (Figure 7.5) that highlights the importance of what Richie (1994) refers to as the context in which choices are made.

This chapter has addressed the main aims of the study, resulting in some key insights in relation to city break motivation and decision making. Such insights are helpful as they allow for the development of more accurate marketing and communication strategies. The value of this is best summed up by Sirakaya & Woodside (2005, p.830) who state;

*Travel marketers and destination developers must understand the tourist decision process, in order to develop effective marketing strategies because decision behaviour (buyer behaviour) is the structure upon which marketing must hang.*

The next chapter will conclude the study by reviewing the principal findings and examining their contribution to existing knowledge. In addition, the limitations of the research will be highlighted and suggestions for further investigation of the topic are proposed.



# Chapter Eight

## Conclusions

## **8.1 Introduction**

This study has analysed the characteristics of city break travel and in particular, the motivations and decision making behaviour involved in taking such trips. In doing so, a considerable amount of knowledge has been gained and a better understanding of the city break market has been achieved. This is both timely and useful given the importance that city breaks have assumed in contemporary holiday taking. The need for a thorough and comprehensive investigation of this segment of the tourism market was particularly evident. Although there was much anecdotal information on city breaks, very little empirical data were available in the public domain. As an academic research area within the tourism field, city breaks almost didn't feature. This study should therefore contribute significantly to the existing (albeit limited) knowledge base on the topic.

## **8.2 Research Approach**

To satisfy the specific research aims of this study an interdisciplinary approach was adopted. Insights from a variety of areas, such as Consumer Behaviour, Psychology, and Sociology, were utilised and incorporated into the research framework. This gathering of knowledge from a variety of disciplines was necessary given the nature of the topic being researched.

Following an extensive trawl of the literature two fundamental gaps were identified. Firstly, no clear picture of city break visitors or their trips existed in the literature. This confirmed the need to identify and separate this visitor segment and explore its characteristics. The value of segmenting on the basis of type of trip had been highlighted by a number of authors (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Sung et al., 2001) which reaffirmed the merits of such an approach.

Secondly, there was a significant research gap in relation to city break motivation and decision making. Most of the existing tourism decision models did not reflect the specifics of many contemporary travel decisions and as such a more indicative model was evidently required.

In response to these main gaps a two-phase research approach was adopted, with the first phase examining the characteristics of city break travellers and their trips and the second exploring the motives and decision making behaviour involved in such trips. Phase One involved gathering and analysing quantitative data regarding the city break visitor market, while Phase Two consisted of semi-structured interviews which probed people's motives and decision making behaviour. Both approaches complemented each other and each was successful in acquiring the necessary information to satisfy the research aims.

### **8.3 Review of Research Aims and Results**

The aims of the study, which are restated in Table 8.1, proceeded to guide and direct the research effort throughout. Each has been addressed and discussed in detail in the previous chapter and therefore will be reviewed here only in terms of the most salient and significant findings relating to each. These findings can be categorised into two main headings – those that contributed to our knowledge of city break travellers and the nature of the trips they take; and those which provided insight into their motives and decision making behaviour.

#### **8.3.1 Research Aims**

1. To examine the city break travel phenomenon by reviewing existing literature and studies on the topic.
2. To develop a profile of city break visitors by comparing them to other city tourists.
3. To analyse the distinctiveness of a city break holiday by finding out its principal characteristics and features.
4. To investigate the motivations and decision-making behaviour of city break holidaymakers.
5. To examine the influence of 'type of trip' in the travel decision making process.

### **8.3.2 Knowledge of City Break Travellers and their Trips**

The most distinctive characteristic of city break travellers relates to their origin. The vast majority of city breakers to Dublin came from the UK. This was primarily due to access and time issues associated with such trips. In addition to visitor origin, city breakers also showed more variety in relation to their educational achievements and occupational backgrounds in comparison to other city holidaymakers. This included a higher proportion of lower skilled and lower educated visitors. Such a finding is a possible reflection of the accessibility of city breaks as a travel option for all strata of society and not just the wealthy or intellectually inquisitive who would traditionally have been the main consumers of international leisure travel. Thus, the cost and simplicity of city breaks may be seen to have contributed to what Richter (2003) refers to as the ‘democratisation’ of travel.

Some noteworthy findings were also uncovered in relation to the characteristics of the city break trip. These were summarised into five different features which were labelled the 5 Ds; *Duration*, *Discretionary nature*, *Distance*, *Destination travel party*, and *Date flexibility*. The findings revealed the city break trip to be distinctive in all five of these key areas. For example, the majority of city breaks were found to be secondary trips – taken, in most cases, to supplement a main holiday. However, unlike the main holiday, which in many cases was an established annual ritual, the city break usually represented a discretionary purchase of a shorter duration. This means in a number of cases it was unplanned and often occurred out of personal situational factors. The research showed that cities as destinations lend themselves easily to short discretionary trips, mainly because of the wide range of visitor experiences they can offer in a relatively small geographical area. These can easily be consumed by most visitors in a short period of time.

Related to these factors is the small distance involved in most city break trips. For many people the need to get away for a short break necessitated careful use of their travel time. This usually meant a preference for point to point air access involving short journey times. In these situations, cities were viewed as ideal destinations, mainly because the holiday could begin almost immediately, as there was no need for onward connections or transfers. The low cost airlines have greatly facilitated this trend. As noted in the literature review, their emphasis on short haul,

point to point routes at low cost make them ideal for the needs of discretionary short break travellers. In this regard, they also have advantages over road transport. This was evident in the findings where a few of the interviewees opted for an international city break over a domestic one because of the quicker access which flying offered over car transport.

City breaks were also notable for the absence of children in most trips. The majority of people travelled with partners or friends - with just a small proportion taking children. This was mainly due to people either not having children or using the city break as a rest from them. However, part of the reason may also lie in the specific perception that people had of Dublin as a family destination. Certainly, the results from the interviews reflect a number of negative comments on the facilities (or lack of) for children in the city. However, it would be necessary to carry out further research in this area in order to establish if this is a common trend across other cities.

Another interesting result relates to the arrival patterns of city break trips. The findings from Phase One showed them to be less seasonally sensitive than other leisure holidays. Unlike the heliotropic focus of many main holidays, city breaks were much less weather dependent. In addition, as most were secondary trips, they tended to be taken outside of peak times. This has significant implications for city marketers and planners – with opportunities for city tourism stakeholders to attract visitors in the shoulder and off peak periods.

### **8.3.3 *Understanding of City Break Motivation and Decision Making***

According to Blackwell et al. (2001) a good knowledge of consumer behaviour is essential if effective marketing strategies are to be implemented. Understanding the motivations and decision making behaviour of one's target market has become a prerequisite for successful marketing. From the results of Phase Two of the research, a large amount of data emerged relating to all aspects of the decision process. Some of the most notable findings will now be reviewed.

### **8.3.3.1 *Distinctiveness of City Break Motives***

The results in relation to motives proved extremely insightful as they offered comparisons between respondents' city breaks and their main holidays. Differences emerged on a number of fronts – for example, city breaks were found to mostly stem from a need to escape the routine of the home environment and to engage in certain touristic activities at the destination. To this end, city breaks were viewed as 'doing' holidays – e.g. visiting attractions, going to pubs and nightclubs, shopping, and so on. By contrast main holidays mostly stemmed from the need to relax, chill out - and for many - to spend 'quality time' as a family. This 'doing' aspect of city breaks is an interesting finding as it also marks a difference between such trips and many other types of short breaks such as spa weekends or hotel breaks – trips which mostly centre on the relaxation motive.

Similar differences emerged with regard to the socialising motive. For example, with city breaks, the need to socialise with other people mostly related to adults (usually partners). In a number of cases this socialising had a romantic or relationship building element (trips included anniversaries, birthdays, and in one case a honeymoon). This contrasts with many main holidays where the focus was on building relationships with children and/or amongst the family unit as a whole.

Another notable push factor to emerge was the 'gift giving' motive. Although this did not register at all for main holidays it featured quite prominently for city breaks. This was an unexpected finding and highlighted the apparent suitability of these trips as gift products. Interestingly, this is something that has only recently begun to be exploited by tourism product providers and intermediaries. Companies such as Ryanair have begun to offer gift vouchers aimed at city break travellers on their websites. Such products clearly hold sales potential – particularly as they offer the buyer a range of benefits including; satisfying altruistic and/or self esteem motives and, in some cases, the opportunity to accompany the recipient on the trip.

The two overriding pull factors that proved most influential for city breaks were, ease of access and cost. In most cases the ability of people to get to their destination with the minimum amount of hassle and for the minimum amount of money was crucial. These two factors are particularly

salient for short discretionary trips such as city breaks. It is likely that in the future, cities that can offer easy and quick access at a reasonable cost will have a significant advantage over competitors in terms of attracting city break travel. Obviously such cities will also need to have attractive tourism infrastructure in order to be fully successful – however, as these findings have shown, people are sometimes willing to overlook a more culturally interesting destination in favour of a cheaper and more conveniently accessible one.

One of the most important discoveries from the comparative analysis of people's motives was the multi-motivational aspect of people's travel behaviour. The results highlight the motivational heterogeneity that exists in contemporary travel behaviour and the limitations involved in assigning specific sets of motives to certain visitor groups based on characteristics such as age, occupation or other similar factors. Alternatively, the findings showed that trip type can be a more useful measure of people's motivational behaviour.

#### ***8.3.3.2 Information Search and Level of Involvement***

The search for information during the city break purchase was notably short. This was reflected in the small number of sources consulted and the relatively short period of time spent searching. The internet featured prominently throughout the information search stage – dominating both the degree and direction of the search. In addition, as Phase One results showed, special flight deals sourced on the internet were the most influential factors in the decision to travel to Dublin. Other information sources that proved important were friends and family - with many respondents putting a lot of trust in such sources. Such limited search behaviour meant city breaker's overall level of involvement was relatively low. However, interestingly, a significant number of people also revealed a similar pattern for their main holidays – particularly where the risk levels were considered to be reduced such as with inclusive packages or repeat visits.

#### **8.3.3.3 Choice and Purchase of City Break Trips**

For the majority of city breakers the choice of Dublin was made without considering any other destination. For those who did, the number of alternatives considered was generally small, with an average consideration set of just 1.67 - further confirmation of low involvement behaviour. In terms of selection attributes, the two previously mentioned pull motives, *ease of access* and *cost*, proved to be the most salient. An important finding with regard to ease of access related to the practice, by a number of people, of selecting cities based on routes originating from their local airport. This meant they only considered a city if it was served by an airport near their home. Such people obviously placed significant importance on convenience in relation to travel time. This is an important finding and one that could indicate certain marketing opportunities. For example, it may be worthwhile for city tourism stakeholders in Dublin to specifically target population centres within an hour or two of all airports serving Dublin. Such a strategy may be more efficient than a blanket approach that does not make any geographical distinctions in relation to the target market.

People's purchasing behaviour of city breaks was notable in a few respects. Firstly, high internet usage was again a prominent feature, with results from both phases of the research showing the majority of city breakers booking their holiday online. The relatively uncomplicated nature of the trips was an important factor in this. The findings show the vast majority of city breaks consisted of just two elements, transport and accommodation, and therefore unlike most main holidays (which tended to be more complicated) booking online was considered the most appropriate route. However, it should be noted that not everyone felt the internet was the best booking method. A couple of people commented on the difficulty of searching for suitable deals and the complexity of trying to match flights and accommodation. On the other hand, for others there was a great sense of accomplishment when they managed to source and book the different components of the trip themselves.

The timing of bookings was also interesting to observe. The findings show city breaks were purchased noticeably closer to departure time compared to main holidays. In fact, the results in general show city break purchasing behaviour as being more opportunistic and impulsive than main holidays. Situational factors were found to play a particularly significant role in this regard



– with specific circumstances or events often playing a crucial part in the decision to take the trip.

#### **8.3.3.4 *Image and Overall Experience***

The overriding image that most people had of Dublin before they arrived was one of a fun and lively destination. Much of this was linked to the city's pub culture – with Guinness figuring strongly in people's comments. However, besides Guinness, hardly any other physical feature was associated with the city. In addition, and worryingly for the city's marketers, a significant number of British visitors either had no prior image of Dublin at all, or considered it to be just another version of a British city. Such findings may indicate weaknesses in Dublin's brand image, particularly in terms of product differentiation and positioning. A positive finding for the city's tourism industry was the overall satisfaction rating which was achieved. Ninety percent of interviewees stated the holiday had matched or exceeded expectations. The fun and lively image that most had envisaged was felt to have been delivered. In addition, many cited friendliness as a significant factor in their enjoyment of the holiday.

An interesting discovery related to the physical changes that have occurred in Dublin in recent years – both in terms of its built environment and its resident population. Most people expressed surprise at these changes and viewed them with a mixture of positive and negative reactions. However, it is obvious that Dublin's recent transformation needs to be communicated more clearly by the city's marketing bodies to ensure people are receiving an accurate and contemporary image of Dublin.

#### **8.3.3.5 *A New City Break Travel Decision Model***

Following the findings of Phase One and Two, it became apparent that most of the existing travel decision models discussed in the literature review were inadequate in describing or explaining the city break travel decision. Thus, a new model that was more reflective of the process was constructed using the main concepts and themes that had inductively emerged from the research findings. The new model describes a less extensive problem solving decision making pattern, showing little of the funnelling activity that had been a feature of many previous models. It

also highlights the importance of situational factors which have consistently emerged as being significant in the city break decision.

#### **8.3.4 *Type of Trip and the Travel Decision***

One of the most consistent themes emerging from this research has been the importance of ‘type of trip’ in the travel decision process. The findings have shown that trip characteristics such as the 5 Ds can have a significant bearing on the decision making behaviour of travellers. In order to illustrate this, a model was constructed that represented a range of different decision processes across a continuum. The model (see Figure 7.5 in previous chapter) suggests that type of trip will influence what kind of decision process a person will engage in when purchasing a holiday, particularly in terms of the degree of problem solving and the level of involvement. This model provides a useful analytical tool, for both academics and practitioners, in terms of predicting decision making styles of different visitor groups by examining the key characteristics of their trips.

### **8.4 Contribution of the Research**

The principal findings in this research add to the existing pool of knowledge relating to city break travel. As already outlined, the topic has been largely neglected by academic researchers, with few detailed examinations of the subject ever undertaken. This work therefore goes some way to filling this knowledge gap. Its principal value can be seen in the following contributions;

1. The research has shed light on a number of primary characteristics relating to both city break travellers themselves and the specific trips they take. Importantly, the research has not just described these characteristics but also measured them in terms of how they differ from other city leisure travellers. This is important as city break visitors have rarely been separately identified or examined in prior research.
2. The findings have helped to explain the principal motives behind city break trips and in particular, how these differ from main holiday motives. Such knowledge provides useful insights into the multi-motivational aspect of people’s trip taking behaviour.

3. A better understanding of the particular stages, elements, and influences involved in the city break decision making process has been achieved. This should provide a basis for more accurate marketing and communication strategies aimed at this visitor segment.
4. The research has also resulted in the development of a number of new models that provide meaningful insights into the systems and processes relating to city break travel. These include the Push and Pull Multi-Motivational Model, the City Break Decision Making Model, and the Type of Decision Model. All these along with the 5Ds concept aid in the conceptualisation of city break travel.

Taken as a whole the above outputs represent a considerable amount of new insights on the city break phenomenon. This will not only contribute significantly to our existing knowledge on the topic but also stimulate further debate and research – something which is gravely needed.

## **8.5 Reflections on Research Methodology**

As outlined in Chapter 4 the research methodology adopted for this study followed a line of ‘methodological appropriateness,’ which basically involved choosing the most suitable research methods for the data requirements of the investigation. This resulted in a two-phase research approach being implemented in a sequential manner. Phase One consisted of a quantitative survey of 1,000 visitors to Dublin, from which the city break and non city break visitor cohorts were separated and compared. This method proved successful for eliciting the necessary comparative data to examine the distinctiveness of the city break travel market. However, in order to achieve the principal requirement of the study – to explore the motivation and decision making behaviour of city break travellers – it was necessary to use a qualitative approach. This was due to the nature of the specific data required. As Decrop (1999b, p.360) points out

*...a qualitative approach is strongly recommended in tourism for studying motivations, attitudes, and behaviour, for understanding how decisions are made and how tourist experiences are lived.*

Thus, Phase Two consisted of 40 semi-structured interviews with city break visitors to Dublin. Both phases complemented each other with Phase One setting the scene by building a picture of the city break travel market and providing details which subsequently helped in sample selection for Phase Two. Consequently the quality and richness of the data from Phase Two allowed themes and concepts relating to city break motivation and decision making to emerge. Accordingly, when reviewing the results as a whole, it can be concluded that both research phases proved successful and justified the mixed method approach adopted.

### **8.5.1 *Limitations of the research***

Despite the overall success of the research methodology, a number of limitations were nonetheless identified. Probably the most significant of these relates to the generalisability of the results. As explained in Chapter 4, the nature of the research topic necessitated an exploratory approach where depth was favoured over breadth. Thus, the emphasis was placed on exploring themes and concepts rather than testing existing hypotheses. However, because the primary research focused on Dublin city, the extent to which the findings are transferable to other cities is not clear and therefore caution needs to be exercised. Two issues in particular need to be mentioned in this regard. The first concerns Dublin's high reliance on its near neighbour (Britain) for the bulk of its city break demand. How similar this trend is for other cities is difficult to gauge as little comparative data exists. However, as pointed out previously, there is evidence from many cities of a high reliance on near neighbour markets in terms of general urban tourism demand. It is likely therefore that the city break cohort within this follows a similar pattern. The second issue relates to Dublin's geographical location. As a city situated on an island, Dublin's international city break demand relies almost exclusively on air traffic and therefore does not reflect city breakers who arrive by road transport. For cities in continental Europe road transport is obviously a more significant travel mode. However it should be borne in mind that the short term nature of most city breaks heightens the importance of short journey times. This was highlighted in the interviews where some people decided against a long car journey to a domestic city in favour of a shorter plane journey to Dublin. Moreover, the increased low cost flying options available throughout Europe have made taking a flight much more feasible for international city breakers.

Thus, although there are reasons to be cautious about generalising in relation to these findings there is little doubt that many of the themes and issues are applicable to other cities. For example, factors such as the importance of the internet, and the secondary nature of the trips are likely to be valid in most international city break purchase situations.

## **8.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

While this research has contributed to the existing knowledge of city break travel, it would undoubtedly be beneficial to build on it through further research. In particular, research that would examine whether the main findings identified here are more widely representative would be useful. With regard to the quantitative findings, a possible option might be to utilise the European Cities Marketing visitor survey (similar to the one used in this research) currently being carried out in other European cities. A multi-city research project could be undertaken that involved isolating and examining the international city break cohort from a selection of these surveys. This would provide rich comparative data on the nature and distinctiveness of the city break market in a European context. In addition, this could be expanded to include a qualitative study (similar to this research) using a smaller representative sample. This would allow further comparisons in terms of city break motives and decision making. Such a project would add significantly to our understanding of city break travel across Europe and importantly, would highlight the similarities and discrepancies between the different destination cities. However, such an undertaking would need to be carefully coordinated in order to ensure ‘reliability’ across the different studies.

Another valuable research undertaking would be to further examine the relationship between ‘type of trip’ and level of involvement in decision making. It would be interesting to compare a range of different trip types using the 5 Ds outlined in this research. To this end, the ‘Type of Trip Model’ presented in the previous chapter could be used and tested. Such a project would provide further insight into the relationship between the characteristics of a trip and the type of decision making behaviour employed.

In addition, future testing could also include the multi-motivational model outlined in the previous chapter. This could be used to examine people's motives over a wide range of holidays, highlighting commonalities and differences between each.

## **8.7 Summary**

According to Ratcliffe (2003), the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of cities, with both the commercial and cultural world increasingly characterised by cities rather than countries. This importance and emphasis on urban centres calls for increased understanding of both their function and appeal. As highlighted in the literature review, the tourism component of the urban economy has received greater attention in recent years as its significance has become increasingly recognised. However, within the urban tourism sector the city break travel element has failed to feature to any significant degree in terms of research attention. This study has specifically addressed this deficit by examining this important market segment in the context of Dublin city. The findings show this visitor group to have distinctive characteristics and consumer behaviour patterns. As the changing structure of trip taking by Europeans continues to influence the growth of city breaks, the need for up to date information of this market has become more pressing. The cities that have such information will be in a strong position to offer appropriate products and services that ensure they remain competitive and ultimately sustainable. As Engel et al. (1995, p.12) importantly point out, “understanding and adapting to consumer motivation and behaviour is not an option – it is an absolute necessity for competitive survival.”

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## Appendix 4.1

### Modified Dublin Visitor Survey

Questionnaire No:

Location:

**Q1a) Do you live in Dublin?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes terminate interview here

**Q1b) Do you work in Dublin?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes terminate interview here

**Q2) Are you spending at least one night away from your normal place of residence?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

If YES Continue

**Q3) How does your visit to DUBLIN fit into your trip away from home?**

Dublin is my only destination on this trip away from home

1

Dublin is my main destination on this trip, but I shall visit other places en route to and from Dublin

2

Dublin is one of a number of destinations that I am visiting on this trip

3

I am visiting Dublin en route to and from my main destination

4

Other (specify)

5

**Q4a) Which one of these best describes the main purpose of your visit to Dublin?**

On holiday away from home

1

On a day out/day trip from home

2

Visiting friends or relatives – on holiday

3

Visiting friends or relative – other reason

4

Shopping only

5

On a business trip

6

Attending a conference/exhibition

7

Other (specify)

8

**Q4b) Would you best describe this holiday as your main holiday this year**

1

...an additional/secondary holiday

2

...a short break

3

...other (specify)

4

**Q4c) Would you describe it as a city break?** Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐

**Q5a) How many nights will you be spending away from home on this trip?**

**Q5b) How many of these nights will you be spending in....**

(ii) Dublin?

(iii) Other parts of the Republic of Ireland?

**Q6) What type(s) of accommodation have you or will you use(more than one answer allowed)?**

Luxury, superior class hotel	1
Moderate quality hotel	2
Standard or budget hotel	3
Guest House	4
Bed and breakfast in a private home	5
Rented flat/house	6
University/college accommodation	7
Youth Hostel	8
Tourist caravan/tent	9
Static caravan/tent	10
Staying with friends/relatives	11
Second Home	12
Other (Specify)	13

**Q7) How did you book your accommodation in and travel to Dublin?**

	Accommodation	Travel
Travel Agent	1	1
Tour Operator	2	2
Part of an organised Tour	3	3
Directly with accommodation	4	4
Directly with local tourist office	5	5
Staying with friends or relatives	6	6
Directly with airline/ferry/train/bus operator	7	7
Through the internet	8	8
Other (Specify)	9	9
Did not book	0	0
Booked by a third party	+1	+1

**Q8) Did you book your accommodation before arriving in Dublin, or after you arrived?**

Before arrival	1
On arrival	2
Staying with friends/relatives/second home	3
Haven't booked yet	0
Booked by third party	4

**Q9) When did you book your accommodation in Dublin?**

Less than a week before arriving	1
1-4 weeks before arriving	2
5-8 weeks before arriving	3
9-12 weeks before arriving	4
More than 12 weeks before arriving	5

**Q10a) What was your main forms of transport to Dublin?**

Private car/van	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Hired car/van	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Train	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Plane	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Boat/ferry	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Bicycle	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Motorbike	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Public bus/coach	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Private bus/coach	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Walked/hitchhiked	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

**Q10b) During your stay in Dublin, which of these forms of transport...**

(i)...have you already used to get about the city?

(ii)...have you used most often (one answer only)

Mode of transport	i) Used	ii) Used most often
Car	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	1
Train	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	2
Taxi	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	3
Public bus	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	4
Bus-sightseeing tour	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	5
Private coach	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	6
Motorbike	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	7
Bicycle	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	8
Walked	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	9

**Q11) On a rating scale from 1-10, with 10 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how would you rate your overall visit to Dublin so far?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

**Q12) Which of the following activities, if any, have you done or will you do on this visit to Dublin?**

Shopping	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting sights/attractions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting museums	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting exhibitions	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Going to the theatre	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Going to concerts	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Walking around the city	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Go on an organised tour	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Take an excursion out of the city	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Go out in the evening to pub/bar	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Go out in the evening to restaurant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Watching a sporting event	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Taking part in a sporting activity	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting a night-club/disco	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify):	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
None of these	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

**Q12b) What activity is most important when deciding to visit Dublin?**

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**Q 13) Please tell me how much or how little an influence each of the following were on your decision to visit DUBLIN?**

Influences	A major influence	Some Influence	Not much influence	No influence	Don't Know	N/A
a. A previous visit						
b. Advice from friends & relatives						
c. Articles in magazines/ newspaper						
d. Ads in magazines/newspapers						
e. Tourist brochure						
f. Guide book						
g. Radio programmes coverage						
h. Television prog./coverage						
i. Advertising on television						
j. Site on Internet						
k. Advice from a travel agent						
l. Tourist Information Centre						
m. National Tourist Board						
n. Other (specify)						
o. Inexpensive air fare						
p. Inexpensive ferry price						
q. Inexpensive accommodation						

**Q14) Please state sources of information you have consulted in relation to this trip?**

	<b>Before</b>	<b>Arrival</b>
Received brochures/leaflets from Irish/Dublin Tourist Board	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessed the internet (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obtained information from Friends/Relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel agent/Tour Operator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Group Leader/Organiser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guide books (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Sources (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q15) How many times (if any) have you previously visited Dublin in the last 10 years?**

**Q16) How likely are you to visit Dublin again in the future?**

Very likely	1
Quite likely	2
Not very likely	3
Not at all likely	4
Don't know	5

**Q17) Please tell me how much or how little you agree or disagree with each statement?**

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't Know
a. It's a safe city to visit	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. The people are friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. It's a dirty city	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. It has good nightlife	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. It's too crowded for sightseeing	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Prices are too expensive	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Pleasant weather for sightseeing	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Easy to get around city	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Plenty of good restaurants	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Good value for money	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. A good variety of visitor attractions	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. It has a rich cultural life	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. There are a lot of museums to visit	1	2	3	4	5	6



**Q18a) How much money approximately did you/will you spend on each of the following items( Per person per day)?**

	<b>Currency</b>	<b>€</b>
Accommodation		
Meals, Snacks & Drinks		
Tourist Shopping		
Entertainment		
Other miscellaneous items e.g.		
Total Spend		

**Q18b) Cost of Package**

	<b><i>Currency</i></b>	<b>€</b>	<b>No .of Days</b>
Cost of Package			

CLASSIFICATION DATA			
<b>C1. GENDER</b>		<b>C.5 <u>PARTY SIZE</u></b>	
Male	1	Number of Adults _____	
Female	2	Number of Kids _____	
<b>C2 <u>OCCUPATION</u></b>		<b>C.6 <u>PARTY COMPOSITION</u></b>	
<b>Job Title:</b>		<b>How is party comprised?</b>	
Self employed/farmer/freelancer	1	Alone	1
Senior executive or senior civil servant	2	Partner	2
White collar worker, civil servant	3	Family	3
Skilled worker	4	Group of friends	4
Other worker	5	Group trip	5
Pensioner	6	Other (Specify.....)	6
Housewife/househusband	7		
Student/pupil	8		
Currently without work	9		
Other	10		
<b>C.3 <u>HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION</u></b>		<b>C.7 <u>AGE</u></b>	
Primary level only	1	15-18	1
Secondary level education	2	19-24	2
Post-secondary level	3	25-34	3
Apprenticeship or trade certification	4	35-44	4
Third level diploma/degree	5	45-54	5
Higher degree	6	55-64	6
Other qualification	7	65+	7
(specify):			
<b>C.4 <u>COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE</u></b>		Name : _____	
Northern Ireland	1	Address: _____	
Britain	2	_____	
Germany	3	_____	
France	4	_____	
Netherlands	5	_____	
Italy	6	Interviewers Signature	
Other European (Specify .....)	7	_____	
USA	8	_____	
Canada	9	Date	
Australia/New Zealand	10	_____	
Other (Specify	11	_____	
.....)			
Nationality: _____			

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION**

## Appendix 4.2

### Interview Request Letter



Dear Guest

Are you currently on a city break visit to Dublin, from outside the Republic of Ireland? Would you like to receive a memento of your visit? I am a lecturer in Dublin Institute of Technology and will be conducting interviews with city break visitors as part of my PhD. research. Interviewing will be carried out all day tomorrow, Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November, in this hotel. If you are visiting Dublin only, and would be willing to take part I would like to hear from you. All participants will receive a complimentary gift as a token of gratitude.

The interviews will follow a schedule, therefore to arrange a time that is suitable for you please contact Gerry today on (01) 402 7548 (before 6.00pm) or 087 9822078 (after 6.00pm).

Thank You

## Appendix 4.3

### Interview Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- *Leisure city breaker (screen)*
- *Explain the reason for interview*
- *Permission to tape*

- Personal details**
- origin (what airport / port did you use)
  - occupation
  - family (partner / kids)
  - age

- Trip characteristics**
- length of trip
  - time of week
  - travel party
  - access transport used
  - accommodation used
  - Sites visited /will visit

- Travel history**
- how many trips (if any) in the past year? (*Probe*)
  - last main holiday? – where? How long? With whom?
  - Other trips – what kind – where to?
  - Have you taken a city break before? Where?

<b>Motives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did the idea to take this trip first come into your mind? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> <li>- Why did you feel the need to take this trip?</li> <li>- Why was that important? / tell me more about that? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Info search</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you look for any information to help your decision?</li> <li>- Where did you look? Where else? What order? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> <li>- Importance of each source of information? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What other destinations (if any) did you consider?</li> <li>- How did you choose between these? What were the deciding factors? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> <li>- Did you consider another <i>type</i> of trip such as a cheap sun holiday?</li> </ul>
<b>Purchase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How / where did you book each component/package?</li> <li>- Why? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> <li>- How long before did you book each component?</li> </ul>
<b>Post purchase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What image did you have of Dublin before you came? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of expectations did you have for this trip?</li> <li>- Have they been met? How have things turned out? (<i>Probe</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Main Holiday</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- motives – Is it a given that you will take a main holiday every year?</li> <li>- How did you decide on X this year?</li> <li>- What was the main motives influencing factors motivation there?</li> <li>- Is there more / less planning involved in the main holiday?</li> </ul>

- How would you say the planning and researching for that holiday compared to your city break? (Probe)
- Was it booked as a package or in separate components? How? (Probe)

Wind up interview – probe any relevant information informally

## Appendix 4.4

### Master List

<b><i>Personal Details</i></b>	<b><i>PD</i></b>	
<b><i>Trip Characteristics</i></b>	<b><i>TC</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Type	TCTY
	Length	TCL
	Timing	TCLI
	Travel Party	TCP
	Transport	TCT
	Accommodation	TCA
	Planning	TCPL
<b><i>Travel History</i></b>	<b><i>TH</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	No	THN
	Type	THTY
	Party	THP
	Repeat Visitor	TMRV
<b><i>Motives</i></b>	<b><i>MO</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Push	MOPS
	Pull	MOPL
<b><i>Information Search</i></b>	<b><i>IS</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Sources	ISSO
	Sequence	ISSQ
	Influence	ISIN
<b><i>Alternatives</i></b>	<b><i>A</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Alts Considered	ACON
	Evaluating Criteria	AEC
<b><i>Purchase Behaviour</i></b>	<b><i>P</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Method	PME
	Experience	PEX
	Timing	PTI
	Type	PTY
	Activity	ACT
<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	<b><i>EV</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Image	EVIM
	Experience	EVEX
<b><i>Main Holiday</i></b>	<b><i>MH</i></b>	
<i>Subcategories</i>	Motive	MHMO
	Planning	MHPL
	Travel Party	MHTP
	Purchase	MHPU
	Timing	MHTI
	Type	MHTY
	Length	MHL
	Alternative	MHA
	Evaluation	MHEV